Beth El Congregation

MIHP# BA-3173

8101 Park Heights Avenue
Batimore, Baltimore County, MD 21208

Constructed between 1959-1960

Private Access

The Beth El synagogue complex is located in Baltimore County along Park Heights Avenue. The synagogue is built into an incline in a gently rolling suburban landscape. The soft curves of the building reflect this character of the site while still maintaining the massiveness of the Modernist complex. Beth El is a distinguished example of a suburban Jewish synagogue and includes spaces for social activities, worship, administration, and education. The complex exemplifies the Modernist design for new suburban synagogues of the 1950s and 1960s. It is massive in its structure, with minimal ornamentation, but it is functionally designed to meet the programmatic needs of the congregation and expresses their values. All of the artwork at the complex, both interior and exterior, is contemporary in style and exhibits the national trend of Modern synagogue architects to incorporate contemporary art into their designs. The complex was designed in 1960 by Sigmund Braverman of Cleveland, with the assistance of local architects Tyler, Ketcham, and Myers. There have been subsequent additions to the synagogue, most of which contribute to the overall flow and original design intent, while allowing for expanded space to meet the congregation's changing needs.

Beth El synagogue is significant as the work of a prominent Jewish architect, Sigmund Braverman, who designed the sanctuary, social hall, corridor spaces, and a portion of the education building. Braverman, who primarily worked in and around Cleveland, Ohio, was

known for his innovative synagogue designs, and spent his entire career developing synagogues and other Jewish-related facilities. This is his only work in the State of Maryland. Beth El is significant under Criterion C as an example of Modern post World War II Jewish suburban religious architecture. Beth El is also significant as an example of Modern Jewish suburban religious architecture. Beth El, a new Conservative congregation, was formed as established congregations were relocating to suburban locations. The congregation chose, from the outset, to establish itself in Baltimore's northwest suburbs. When it built, consequently, Beth El became one of a unique collection of contemporary synagogues in northwest Baltimore to commission a new building type that allowed for the combination of worship, social/community, administrative, and educational space, all under one roof. The new synagogues were not just houses of worship, but complex centers, used on a daily basis for a wide range of suburban activities. The close proximity of these complexes helped shape Judaism into a new suburban way of life, not just a weekly worship ritual. Beth El was only the second Conservative congregation to construct a suburban synagogue complex. Collectively these complexes pushed Baltimore to the forefront in the renewed interest in and Modernist expression of synagogue architecture that occurred throughout the United States in the late 1940s through the 1960s. The Beth El complex also has significance under Criterion A as an important component of Maryland and Jewish social history; it represents the establishment of a large and thriving Jewish community in Baltimore and its sequential growth and movement to the suburbs in the twentieth century. Beth El is part of a crucial intervention in establishing the rich cultural environment that enabled Jewish ethnic and religious culture to flourish in the context of assimilation, increasing American individualism, and the horrors of Jewish persecution before and during World War II. Finally, Beth El, in designing its new synagogue complex commissioned some of the best contemporary Jewish artists, such as

Raymond Katz, to complete pieces for the building, thus integrating both Modern architecture and Modern art into the new facility. Beth El Congregation's architectural distinction and social significance as the embodiment of a new suburban way of life for one of the nation's oldest and largest Jewish populations makes this resource worthy of designation even though it is less than 50 years old for part of its period of significance.

B-3173

The following National Register of Historic Places form was prepared for inventory documentation purposes only; the property has not been nominated to the National Register.

NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018
MIHP # BA-3173

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Beth El Congregation

other names

2. Location

street & number 8101 Park Heights Avenue ☐ not for publication

city or town Baltimore ☐ vicinity

state Maryland code MD county Baltimore County code 005 zip code 21208

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☐ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby, certify that this property is:
- ☐ entered in the National Register.
  - ☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register.
  - ☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ Determined not eligible for the National Register.
- ☐ removed from the National Register.
- ☐ other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
- ☐ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
- ☐ district
- ☐ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)
N/A

number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion/Religious facility/Church School
Education/School
Social/Meeting Hall

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion/Religious facility/Church School
Education/School
Social History/Meeting Hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
walls Brick
Chapel: concrete
roof Other: Tar and gravel
other

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Description Summary:

The Beth El synagogue complex is located in Baltimore County along Park Heights Avenue. The synagogue is built into an incline in a gently rolling suburban landscape. The soft curves of the building reflect this character of the site while still maintaining the massiveness of the Modernist complex. Beth El is a distinguished example of a suburban Jewish synagogue and includes spaces for social activities, worship, administration, and education. The complex exemplifies the Modernist design for new suburban synagogues of the 1950s and 1960s. It is massive in its structure, with minimal ornamentation, but it is functionally designed to meet the programmatic needs of the congregation and expresses their values. All of the artwork at the complex, both interior and exterior, is contemporary in style and exhibits the national trend of Modern synagogue architects to incorporate contemporary art into their designs. The complex was designed in 1960 by Sigmund Braverman of Cleveland, with the assistance of local architects Tyler, Ketcham, and Myers. There have been subsequent additions to the synagogue, most of which contribute to the overall flow and original design intent, while allowing for expanded space to meet the congregation's changing needs.

General Description:

Site Layout

The Beth El synagogue complex is located on Park Heights Avenue, just north of Interstate 695, the Baltimore Beltway. The 14.7-acre site of the Beth El complex is situated in a gently rolling landscape that consists of large swaths of grassy area and scattered trees. The synagogue is sited in a residential community, in Baltimore's northwest suburbs, in close proximity to several other significant Jewish congregations. The main façade of the complex faces west towards Park Heights Avenue. Although the formal entrance is on the west side, the common entrance is located towards the north end of the building and includes doors from both the west and east. The doors from the east are the most commonly used due to their proximity to the parking areas. The main parking lot is located to the rear of the complex (to the east) so that it is not in view from the street. To the north Beth El borders a wooded area, to the south, the Baltimore Beltway, and to the east, the rear of the Chizuk Amuno synagogue complex.

Beth El is comprised of a single building, with three primary interconnected components. The northern end houses the administration facilities and the primary social hall. Connected to this to the south, there is a curvilinear corridor with various rooms off the western side (original chapel, bride's room, etc.). At the mid-point of this hallway, the sanctuary juts to the east. At the end of the curvilinear corridor is the third component of the building, the school. The school developed over time, from the initial construction of the synagogue until the late 1990s. In addition to these three primary components, there have been later additions to the property such as the Mikveh and the Sarah Gorn Chapel. The Mikveh is located to the rear (east) of the building, adjacent to the education wing. It is accessible only from the outside of the building (there is no entrance to the Mikveh from the interior of the school). The Sarah Gorn Chapel faces Park Heights Avenue. It is one of the most recent additions to the complex, completed in 1997. The chapel is situated at the southern end of the curvilinear hallway, where the social and religious portions of the complex intersect with the education wing.

There is a driveway off of Park Heights Avenue that allows for drop-off at the western common entrance. In addition, a drive leads around the north side of the property to the large parking area in the eastern portion of the site. Around the formal entrance there are large, paved walkways and decorative landscaping. The entire complex is set back approximately 100 feet from Park Heights Avenue. The soft curves of the structure, both in the curvilinear corridor and the rounded façade of the sanctuary, help to relate the massive structure to the gently rolling landscape in which it rests.

Exterior Elevations

The exterior description of the Beth El complex begins on the Park Heights façade, the primary elevation of the complex. From there, it will proceed clockwise around the structure, subsequently describing the south side of

the exterior, the rear elevation, and the north facade.[1] The complex is generally rectangular in form, with longer facades facing Park Heights Avenue and the east, and shorter sides facing north and south.

Park Heights Facade

From Park Heights Avenue, from left to right, the western wall of the auditorium, the common entrance, the western wall of the curvilinear hallway, the upper level of the sanctuary, the formal entrance, the Sarah Gorn Chapel, and the western wall of the school wing are all visible. The entire building is composed of a light beige brick, with darker brick scattered randomly throughout – giving the walls a speckled appearance. The auditorium, located at the north end of the façade is rectilinear and austere in its form, and is approximately two stories in height. There are minimal windows on this portion of the façade and its lack of decoration makes it submissive to the dominant sanctuary at the center of the Park Heights facade. The central portion of the façade is dominated by the one-story exterior façade of a curvilinear corridor, and the massive sanctuary that rises behind and above it. The sanctuary is set back from the westernmost façade, but is considerably taller than the auditorium to the north and the educational wing to the south. Thus the upper portion is visible over the curvilinear corridor from the street. Both the sanctuary and the curvilinear corridor have rounded facades that soften the overall exterior of the building. South of these portions is the recently added Sarah Gorn Chapel. This portion of the building is rectilinear in form and contemporary in style. The southernmost area of the façade facing Park Heights Avenue is the education building. This component is austere and primarily horizontal, although it is two stories in height. Due to the rolling topography of the site, the education wing has a basement that is visible from the exterior to the south, where the site slopes down.

The Offit auditorium is on the northern end of the building. The façade facing Park Heights has seven vertical windows near the center of the two-story space. White concrete piers, extending from the ground to the roofline, separate the windows. Above and below the windows, the façade is comprised of darker bricks whose pattern creates the appearance of a rough texture. Immediately south of the auditorium are the western doors of the common entrance. The entrance has a canopy extending out over the driveway and consists of three sets of double glass doors encased with silver metal framing. Above each set of doors is a glass panel. South of the entrance, a one-story brick wall continues in a southerly direction. This is the exterior of the Felser curvilinear corridor. This wall contains two small clusters of three vertical windows. The clusters are at the northernmost end of the hallway and just north of the formal entrance. Rising above both the west entrance and the one-story brick wall, the second story of the administrative portion of the building is visible. This section is composed of concrete and the upper story windows are visible from the road.

Continuing south, the formal entrance is at the mid-point of the curvilinear corridor. It is comprised of three sets of double wooden doors. Each door has five square windows in a single column. The doors are surrounded with concrete, with two granite columns separating the sets of doors. The approach to this entrance is a

[1] A current floor plan of the Beth El complex is included at the end of this nomination and may provide additional orientation for the reader.

concrete plaza, with benches on both sides. Flanking the entrance are two granite pylons that are approximately as tall as the roof of the sanctuary. Each is crowned with an abstract menorah. The pylons are inscribed with a Hebrew monogram that reads: "To the martyrs of the past" on the north pillar and "To the builders of the future" on the south. Above each set of doors there are three colorful brass and ceramic abstractions of Hebrew letters that are nearly the size of the doors. They symbolize the ways God enters the world or, from north to south: creation, revelation, and redemption. Also visible from Park Heights Avenue, towering above the formal entrance, is the west (rear) wall of the sanctuary. This is also a curvilinear wall and contains sixty narrow, vertical windows. The windows are arranged in two rows of thirty. Within each row, the windows form a staggered pattern. The top row of windows contains stained glass, and represents the books of the Bible. The bottom row contains false windows and appears black from the exterior.

South of the formal entrance, the exterior façade of the curvilinear wall continues south. There is a small cluster of five vertical windows immediately south of the entryway and an additional cluster of three at the southernmost end of the hallway.

Continuing south, the 1999 Sarah Gorn chapel faces Park Heights Avenue. The western facade of the chapel is mainly composed of a warm gray concrete. Towards the north side of the chapel wall there is a tall panel of glass windows, beginning approximately two feet off the ground and extending to the roofline. The remaining portion of the façade contains only six narrow, vertical windows that are evenly spaced in the upper portion of the wall. The chapel addition also has a protruding roof in the center, so that from Park Heights Avenue, the western façade of this raised space is visible. This wall is made from large panels of a cool-gray concrete. Unlike the curvilinear form of the main façade of the synagogue, the 1999 chapel is rectangular in form.

South of the chapel, the two-story north-south wing of the school building is visible. This façade is composed of the same color brick as the rest of the building, although it was not added until 1987. There are eight windows on the second level and fifteen on the lower level.

South Facade

The south elevation primarily consists of the south façade of the education wing. This façade is much shorter than that facing Park Heights Avenue. It is wholly rectilinear in form and rises two and one-half stories from the ground. The façade lacks any ornamentation and contains only a series of windows on each level. The 1997 addition to the building is a two-story east-west wing of classrooms in the southernmost portion of the complex. This façade is also comprised of the same pattern and color of brick as the rest of the building. The second floor has four evenly spaced windows. The first floor also has four windows, but they are compressed in two pairs to allow for two tiny square windows in the middle. Due to the topography of the site, which slopes down to the south, the basement portion of this façade is partially visible. There are five half-size windows allowing natural light to penetrate the basement classrooms. On the western edge of this façade, at the top of the building is a large glass panel with a curvilinear roofline.

Rear Facade

The east façade of the Beth El complex includes the rear of the educational wing, sanctuary, and administrative wing. This façade is somewhat disjointed, and lacks the graceful flow of the Park Heights façade. Again, the rear façade is a long side of the overall structure, thus displaying facades of all portions of the building. The education building, at the southern end of the rear façade, is rectilinear in form. It is generally two-stories in height, with three exterior entrances. The education building extends further east at the southernmost end, and gradually steps back with a series of angled walls. North of the education portion of the façade is the rear wall of the sanctuary. This façade is strikingly dramatic in its curvilinear form, has minimal ornamentation, and rises well over two-stories tall. To the northern end of the rear façade are the administration and social spaces of the complex. Due to damage caused by a fire, there were renovations to this portion of the building in the late 1990s. This end of the rear elevation is also rectilinear and is generally two-stories.

On the south end, the east wall of the 1997 educational wing addition has a series of windows similar to that on the south elevation. The northern edge of this portion of the façade is comprised of a large glass structure with a gently sloping roof which houses the stairwell and an entrance to the building. Continuing north, the east façade of the 1987 addition is two stories tall. The southern portion has three windows on the second level and three clusters of two narrower windows on the first floor. Just north of this area, a short wall of the second-story of the building angles to the west. This angled wall has six square windows above two large windows. On the first level, the wall juts to the west at a right angle, creating the space for an entrance to the school building underneath the angled wall above. North of the angled wall and entrance, there are three large windows on the second floor and two pairs of narrower windows on the ground level. Again, the building wall angles to the west, but this time the angled wall is on both the upper and lower levels. North of this angled wall, the building façade faces east again and contains a large window panel on the second level. This panel has two large rectangular panes on the top and four smaller, square panes on the bottom. On the first level, there is a set of glass double doors. The entryway doors are surrounded with glass windows.

North of this last set of doors, there is a landscaped courtyard that separates the educational wing from the sanctuary. The east façade of the sanctuary is comprised of a three-story curved wall with no windows or other decorative elements. In the center of the wall, just over halfway up the wall there are four small concrete, decorative plaques. There are three in the bottom row and additional one above.

To the north of the sanctuary façade is the eastern façade of the administration portion of the building. The first level is composed of the same color and pattern of brick as the rest of the building, and has an eight-paned window. The panes are arranged in a top row of four and two rows of two beneath. North of this wall is the eastern side of the common entrance to the building. It is identical to that on the west façade and is comprised of three sets of double glass doors with glass panels above. The entrance is set back from the wall just to its south. The second story of the administration wing is made of concrete panels and is set back from the first level wall, in line with the east common entrance. North of the entrance is the east façade of the Offit auditorium, which is similar to that on the west façade.

North Facade

The north elevation of the complex is mainly comprised of the northern wall of the social hall. Due to the landscaping of the site, this façade is not accessible or visible from any vantage point. The primary façade facing north, the exterior wall of the social hall, is rectilinear in form and two stories in height. This façade, as with the south elevation, is a short end of the overall rectangular complex.

Two additional portions of the complex, though, do have north elevations. The 1999 Gorn chapel addition's north façade is visible from the formal entrance and plaza on Park Heights Avenue. This façade is mainly comprised of a warm-gray concrete on the first level. There is a single entrance, comprised of double glass doors, with a single glass panel above. There are six narrow, vertical windows along the western portion of this wall. The roof of the chapel arches up, to the west, creating a second level that is visible from the north. This portion is entirely comprised of large cool-gray concrete panels.

In addition, the 1997 education wing has a north façade that is visible from the parking lot on the east side of the complex. This façade is mainly made of large windows of transparent glass to the east, with a single set of double glass doors on the ground level. The western portion of this façade is made of a lighter brick than the rest of the complex and has no windows or decoration.

Chronology of Beth El

The Beth El complex developed over time as the congregation continued to expand and have changing needs. The main portion of the building remains as designed by Sigmund Braverman in 1960. The original building included the Offit Auditorium at the northern end, administrative space, the curvilinear corridor, sanctuary, Blufeld Chapel, and one wing of an education building. The first alteration occurred in 1979, with the installation of a Memorial Wall inside the Blufeld Chapel. In October 1986, due to space needs, a second Memorial Wall was installed outside of the sanctuary in the curvilinear corridor. The first major building addition was to the school in 1987. This expanded the educational facilities at Beth El and included the Pauline Mash School for Early Childhood Education, Joseph and Corrine Schwartz Education Center, the Asus Library, Kolker Seminar Room, and the Mollie G. Myers Auditorium. One year later, in February 1988, the Weinstein Mikvah, located adjacent to the education building, opened. The Offit Auditorium, an original component of Braverman's design, was renovated in the early 1990s. As demand for education space grew, major additions were completed between 1996 and 1998. These included a second kitchen in the education wing, over seven new classrooms, and a group study room. These additions are now named the Sol and Carlyn Hubert Educational Building and the Berman-Lipavsky Religious School. From 1996 to 1997, following a damaging fire, the administration area of the Beth El complex was renovated. This included updating the office areas and installing a staircase to the second-floor offices and work areas. In 1999, the original Blufeld Chapel was divided into two rooms with a wooden-paneled wall. At the same time, a new chapel, the Sarah Gorn Chapel, was constructed. The new chapel provided expanded worship space for the congregation. The final alteration to Beth El was the renovation of the sanctuary, completed in 2003.

Interior

The original complex of Beth El, designed by Sigmund Braverman in 1960, includes a large auditorium, the administrative offices, the sanctuary, other religious spaces, and the educational wing. The main hallway generally runs north-south and forms a curvilinear corridor with the sanctuary on the east and offices and other smaller rooms on the west. When entering the building from the common entrance off of the parking lot, the Offit Auditorium is to the north. The room can seat up to 1,000 worshippers or 600 for dining and includes a stage along the north wall that was intended for cultural programs and entertainments.[2]

The common entrance leads into a large foyer, with the vestibule to the auditorium on the right. To the left are the reception area and a short hallway leading to the administration wing. The administration area of the building was renovated from 1996-1997, after a fire damaged the original building. The renovation included constructing a new stairwell leading to the second floor of the administration offices. In addition, there is a boardroom, offices of the cantor and executive director, the bookkeeper, and other administrative offices. This entire area is generally located to the northeast end of the building, south of the Offit Auditorium and the common entrance. Past the reception area is the beginning of the curvilinear corridor that leads south through

[2] "Beth El Synagogue to Cost $1,500,000," (Newspaper clipping, June 7, 1959, in Enoch Pratt vertical file collection).

the complex. The northernmost portion of the hallway is flanked on the east by the western wall of the sanctuary and on the west by the Sisterhood store, coatroom, and restrooms. The Sisterhood store was renovated in the spring of 2003. The walls of the hallway are exposed light brown brick that is similar to the exterior façade.

Near the midpoint of the corridor is the formal foyer for the sanctuary. To the western side of this foyer are the three sets of double doors that constitute the ceremonial entrance to the complex facing Park Heights Avenue. On both the north and south sides of the lobby are hand-woven tapestries entitled: "Women of the Bible" and "Visions of Prophets." The foyer walls are travertine.

The three sets of doors that lead to the sanctuary are on the eastern side of the foyer. Above these doors is an inscription in Hebrew that reads: "Open for me the gates of eternal justice that I may enter and praise GOD." The sanctuary is oriented to the east and is oblique in shape, with the bema and Ark along the narrower eastern wall. Atop the bema is a single podium. The sanctuary underwent a major renovation that included reupholstering the seats, replacing the floor, installing acoustical ceiling tiles and replacing the stone along the back wall of the bema in 2003. The sanctuary includes individual seating for 1,440 people. All of the seats have their original wood frames and are still positioned in the original layout. The walls of the sanctuary are mahogany wood paneled with a plinth of brick painted a cream color. On each side are five large stained glass panels on each of the north and south walls. The windows were designed by Raymond A. Katz and represent the Jewish holidays, Shabbat, and the daily mitzvot of Jewish life. The entrance to the sanctuary is along the west (rear) wall, directly across from the Ark. Above the entrance doors is a large painted mural. To either side of the entrance, along the west wall near the ceiling, are twelve staggered stained glass windows. The Ark is made of marble that was mined in Israel. Above the Ark is the Eternal Light.

After passing through the formal foyer, the curvilinear corridor continues in a southerly direction. On the west side of the hallway are the meditation room, groom's room, and the bridal suite. The east wall of the corridor houses the congregation's Memorial Wall. The wall contains twelve bronze relief panels signifying the Hebrew months above the memorial plaques. Throughout this portion of the corridor the walls are cream painted brick. The meditation room and groom's room were formerly one room that functioned as the congregation's Bluefield chapel; it was used from 1960 to 1998 for daily minyan services and life cycle events, e.g. weddings, baby namings, special aliyot. This area was renovated in 1999 and divided into the two distinct rooms. In what is now referred to as the meditation room, there is an additional memorial wall and five small stained glass windows, also designed by Raymond A. Katz. The partition that now separates this room from the groom's room is made of wood paneling that is similar to the walls of the sanctuary.

At the terminus of the sanctuary and bridal suite, the corridor continues, but is no longer curved. This change indicates the beginning of the educational wing of the complex. Immediately after entering this wing there is a short east-west hallway that leads to the chapel constructed in 1999. The Sarah Gorn chapel is arranged in a traditional seating pattern with the bema in the center and a portable Ark. There is a skylight over the Ark. The room contains a number of symbolic artworks. Along the walls are twenty-two niches with filigree sculpture

of words relating to Judaic values rendered in engraved metal. There are two towering glass sculptures as well. In the northwest corner, the sculpture is comprised of warm-toned glass that symbolizes Moses' walk guiding people through the desert and the fire that led them at night. In the southeast corner, the towering sculpture is made of cool-toned glass representing the clouds that led them through the day.

The educational portion of the complex, which houses an afternoon religious school, was completed in three phases. The additions were made progressively to the south end of the building. The original portion includes school offices on either side of the main hallway, with the Schapiro Auditorium on the southwest side. Across from the auditorium is an east-west corridor that houses twelve of the original classrooms. The entire educational wing is two-stories tall (the basement portion was expanded as the building grew). The basement of the original portion houses additional classroom space. The original classrooms have handsome built-in wood closets and cupboards around an alcove space outfitted with coathooks, positioned on the hall side of each room.

The first addition to the school opened in October 1987. This addition includes the Myers Auditorium, and seminar room on the upper level, with additional classroom space on the lower level; it also included a teacher's lounge, computer room, music room, science lab, and the two-story Asus library, which was originally fitted with a large aquarium. In 1988 the Elliot and Susan Weinstein Mikvah was opened, the only Mikvah in Baltimore built for a conservative congregation. It is attached to the 1987 addition, but is only accessible from the outside. A Mikvah is a ritual bath that is used for cleansing rites before marriage, conversion ceremonies, and other religious functions. Orthodox Judaism prescribes that congregants can only use Mikvahs at non-Orthodox synagogues if they are accessible from the exterior. Although Beth El is a conservative synagogue, it designed the Mikvah to only have exterior access, thus making it useable by both Conservative and Orthodox Jews.

In 1997, the final wing was completed, providing seven additional classrooms. In addition, this wing includes a kitchen space and a teachers' lounge. The 1997 addition is the southernmost portion of the Beth El complex and is oriented around an east-west corridor.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- ☒ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☒ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Area of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Art
Education
Religion
Social History

Period of Significance
1959-1999
1948-1970

Significant Dates
1959-1960, 1987, 1988, 1997, 1999

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder
Sigmund Braverman

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Previous documentation on files (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #_____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☒ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: University of Maryland, School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation

Summary Statement of Significance:

Beth El synagogue is significant as the work of a prominent Jewish architect, Sigmund Braverman, who designed the sanctuary, social hall, corridor spaces, and a portion of the education building. Braverman, who primarily worked in and around Cleveland, Ohio, was known for his innovative synagogue designs, and spent his entire career developing synagogues and other Jewish-related facilities. This is his only work in the State of Maryland. Beth El is significant under Criterion C as an example of Modern post World War II Jewish suburban religious architecture. Beth El, a new Conservative congregation, was formed as established congregations were relocating to suburban locations. The congregation chose, from the outset, to establish itself in Baltimore's northwest suburbs. When built, consequently, Beth El became one of a unique collection of contemporary synagogues in northwest Baltimore to commission a new building type that allowed for the combination of worship, social/community, administrative, and educational space, all under one roof. The new synagogues were not just houses of worship, but complex centers, used on a daily basis for a wide range of suburban activities. The close proximity of these complexes helped shape Judaism into a new suburban way of life, not just a weekly worship ritual. Beth El was only the second Conservative congregation to construct a suburban synagogue complex. Collectively these complexes pushed Baltimore to the forefront in the renewed interest in and Modernist expression of synagogue architecture that occurred throughout the United States in the late 1940s through the 1960s. The Beth El complex also has significance under Criterion A as an important component of Maryland and Jewish social history; it represents the establishment of a large and thriving Jewish community in Baltimore and its sequential growth and movement to the suburbs in the twentieth century. Beth El is part of a crucial intervention in establishing the rich cultural environment that enabled Jewish ethnic and religious culture to flourish in the context of assimilation, increasing American individualism, and the horrors of Jewish persecution before and during World War II. Finally, Beth El, in designing its new synagogue complex commissioned some of the best contemporary Jewish artists, such as Raymond Katz, to complete pieces for the building, thus integrating both Modern architecture and Modern art into the new facility. Beth El Congregation's architectural distinction and social significance as the embodiment of a new suburban way of life for one of the nation's oldest and largest Jewish populations makes this resource worthy of designation even though it is less than 50 years old for part of its period of significance.

Resource History and Historic Context:

Social History of the Jewish Population in Baltimore

The history of the Jewish population in Baltimore, originally comprised first of German Jews and later Eastern European Jews, is essential to an understanding of the trends in suburbanization that resulted in the construction of Chizuk Amuno's suburban synagogue complex. There had been a long tradition of immigration, relocation, and suburbanization within the Jewish community of Baltimore. Throughout different periods of history, the Jewish community relocated, generally to the north and west of the central city, as the result of chain migration patterns, discrimination, institutional support, and the construction of new synagogues. Although during the early years of Eastern European immigration the existing German Jews and the new immigrants generally maintained separate communities both geographically and socially – including separate synagogues -- in the mid-twentieth century they began to merge into a unified Jewish community of Baltimore.

Baltimore Jews played a major role in the development of North American Judaism. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Baltimore was a center for Jewish life in America. Although Maryland's first settlers had purely Christian ideals in mind, they became more hospitable towards Jewish populations over time. In 1632 the proprietary charter for the State of Maryland invoked "zel [sic] for the propagation of the Christian faith." The Act Concerning Religion was passed a few years later, in 1649, as a result of growing tensions between Catholics and Protestants within the state. The Act declared tolerance for Christians, but stated that those persons who did not follow the Christian faith "shall be punished with death and confiscation or forfeiture of all his or her lands and goods."[3]

The first recorded Jewish resident of Maryland was Jacob Lumbrozo, a healer, innkeeper, businessman, and Indian trader. He was sentenced to death in 1658 for blasphemy under the Act Concerning Religion (known as the Tolerance Act), but was later freed under a general amnesty in honor of Richard Cromwell's accession as Lord Protector of England. The next known Jewish settlers were Benjamin Levy, a merchant who moved to Baltimore from Philadelphia, and Solomon Etting, who established the city's water company and later became the director of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.[4]

When Maryland's constitution was adopted in 1776, Jews were forbidden to hold elected office or practice law. Twenty-one years later, Etting and other Jewish residents who were gaining prominence in Baltimore's business community petitioned the Maryland General Assembly to repeal these provisions from the constitution as the

[3] Howell S. Baum, *The Organization of Hope: Communities Planning Themselves* (Albany, NY: 1997), 17; Robert J. Brugger, *Maryland: A Middle Temperament*, 1634-1980 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 20-21.
[4] Baum, 18-19.

Jewish population continued to grow. This law, commonly known as the "Jew Bill", was not passed until 1826. It permitted Jews to hold public office and practice law and allowed Baltimore to become a predominant immigration center for the Jewish community.

The first wave of 19th century Jewish immigration to Baltimore coincided with a massive exile of European Jews who were in search of economic opportunity and political and religious freedom. The earliest immigrants generally hailed from Germany, Bavaria, Bohemia, Austria-Hungary, the Rhineland, and German-speaking Switzerland. These immigrants tended to settle alongside other European immigrants near the entry port in east and southeast Baltimore, around Lombard, High, Exeter, Aisquith, and Central Streets.[5] As early as the 1830s, there were enough Jewish immigrants that viable neighborhoods and community organizations formed.[6]

The first organized congregation in the city was the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, which, as the only synagogue in the city, was known as the Stadt Shul, or the city synagogue. The second synagogue was the Fells Point Hebrew Fellowship (known as the Eden Street Shul) and the third was the Har Sinai Verein, which followed the rituals of Hamburg's Reform temple as opposed to Orthodoxy.[7] In 1853, Temple Oheb Shalom was formed as the fourth congregation in Baltimore, by members of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation who were unhappy with the traditional attitude of their rabbi and the reforms offered by the Har Sinai congregation. Eighteen years later, traditional German Jews who were displeased with the continual reforms occurring at the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation formed the Chizuk Amuno congregation.[8] The Jewish population in Baltimore had grown from 200 families in 1840 to 10,000 individuals in 1880. Many entered the clothing business and prospered as Baltimore grew to have one of the largest clothing trade businesses in America with its Jewish community comprising nearly this entire industry.[9]

The earliest trends of moving out of the central city were the result of class distinctions within the German-Jewish community. A small group of elite Jews began to move out of southeast Baltimore to the northwest. After the Civil War, this trend accelerated, as an enclave of prosperous Jews emerged in the northwest portion of the city. This marked the beginning of a century-long trend of Jewish families moving further away from the city center.[10] From the early years of the mass German immigration, leaders within the Jewish community established charitable organizations to care for their less fortunate. These included the United Hebrew Benevolent Society, the Hebrew Assistance Society, the Hebrew Hospital and Asylum, the Jewish Education Alliance, the Hebrew Free Burial Society, and the Jewish Home for Consumptives.[11]

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[5] Jan Bernhardt Schein, *On Three Pillars: The History of Chizuk Amuno Congregation 1871*-1996 (Baltimore: 2000), 5.
[6] Gilbert Sandler, *Jewish Baltimore: A Family Album* (Baltimore: 2000), 5.
[7] Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 5-6.
[8] Schein, *On Three Pillars, 9.*
[9] Baum, *The Organization of Hope*, 19.
[10] Ibid, 19.
[11] Ibid, 20.

By the late 1860s, the rate of German immigration had drastically slowed, and Jews began arriving (in small numbers at first) from the Russian Empire of Eastern Europe. The Port of Baltimore was the first stop for thousands of Eastern European immigrants, along with Boston, Philadelphia, and New York.[12] This second wave of Jewish immigration into Baltimore flourished in the post-Civil War period. Eastern European Jews were fleeing from persecution, epidemic, and famine. The established German-Jewish population commonly referred to the new immigrants as "Russians", acknowledging the czar's control over Poland, Lithuania, and the Ukraine, among other countries. During the 1880s 24,095 Jews landed in Baltimore, with an additional 20,000 arriving in the 1890s, and 25,000 from 1900-1905.[13] In addition to the immigrants arriving directly in Baltimore, Jews made their way to Baltimore from other eastern ports as the city acted as a "magnet" for Jews.

The newly landed Eastern European Jews encountered an organized, sophisticated German-Jewish community that was generally located around East Lombard and East Baltimore Streets between Central Avenue and the Fallsway.[14] A social divide emerged between the two immigrant groups, reflected in the separation of their synagogues. The existing German-Jewish residents were concerned that the influx of poor "Russian" Jews would damage their social standing.[15]

The Eastern European synagogues -- the Bikur Cholim Congregation (1856), the B'nai Israel Congregation (1873), and the Anshe Chesed Bialystok Congregation (1875) -- were located near the immigrant communities in southeast Baltimore. The rapid surge in immigration resulted in "ghetto-type" conditions within the east Baltimore neighborhoods. As these poor immigrants continued to settle in Baltimore, established German-Jews began to move to the northwest near Eutaw Place and into the established residences, mansions, and grand apartment buildings that lined the boulevard.[16] This caused a geographic rift within the Jewish community of Baltimore. The German-Jews generally lived in the northwest portion of the city and were commonly referred to as "Uptown Jews", while the Eastern European Jews remained in southeast Baltimore and were known as the "Downtown Russians."[17] The Eastern European immigrants arrived with experience in industrial fields, especially tailoring. They often found work in the shops and factories owned by the German-Jewish population. The new immigrants formed organized unions and began to strike out against the German-Jewish factory owners. This caused a deeper rift between the two groups and began to discourage German charitable concern for the less fortunate population.[18]

By 1895, there were four German-Jewish synagogues established in the northwest portion of the city. Within a few blocks of each other were the Chizuk Amuno Congregation, Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, Temple Oheb Shalom, and Har Sinai. The majority of the members of these congregations lived on six main streets –

[12] Schein, *On Three Pillars, 68.*
[13] Baum, *The Organization of Hope*, 20.
[14] Sandler, *Jewish Baltimore*, 4.
[15] Baum, *The Organization of Hope*, 20.
[16] Sandler, *Jewish Baltimore*, 5.
[17] Baum, *The Organization of Hope*, 21.
[18] Ibid, 20-21.

Eutaw Place, Madison Avenue, Linden Avenue, McCulloh Street, Bolton Street, and Druid Hill Avenue. In the history of Chizuk Amuno Congregation Jan Bernhardt Schein notes that "despite differing religious preferences, the German Jews of Baltimore lived side-by-side, served communal organizations together, often intermarried with one another, and some German Jews maintained dual membership – paying dues to more than one synagogue."[19]

By the 1920s, the Eastern European Jewish community had gained both social and economic stability. They subsequently began to follow their German predecessors to the northwest portion of the city and the Park Heights-Reistertown Road area. As a result, the German Jews, still not comfortable living next to the Eastern European communities, began to move further out toward the City boundary and the suburbs.[20] The opening of the Eastern European Shaarei Zion Congregation on Park Heights Avenue, just north of Druid Hill Park, represented the onset of the relocation of the newer immigrants to this portion of the city. Another indicator of these population shifts was the opening of a branch of the German-Jewish, orthodox Shearith Israel Congregation further out on Park Heights Avenue, near Glen Avenue.[21] As the two communities began to move in similar directions, a growing sense of unity began to emerge between the two immigrant populations. There were two main reasons for the Jewish population shift to the north and west. First, the Protestant and Catholic communities of northeast Baltimore, centered in Roland Park, were generally inhospitable to the Jewish population. Second, the Eastern European Jews followed the pattern of movement that the German Jews had earlier embarked on.[22]

During the 1920s there was a construction spree among Jewish congregations throughout the United States. Lay leaders believed that new buildings and renowned cantors would help increase membership and attendance, which dropped off in the 1920s as "increased mobility and the need for financial stability" caused many men to prioritize social and economic pursuits over religious observances. To complicate matters, Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe nearly stopped in 1924 when the United States Congress passed the Johnson Immigration Act, which severely restricted the immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe.[23] Nonetheless, Baltimore's synagogues took advantage of the construction boom of the 1920s in two ways. New assembly spaces attracted Jews who "no longer assembled for community events at privately owned locations…but rather convened for public rallies and memorials at synagogues."[24] Secondly, in striving—perhaps for the first time—to adapt to the changing *American* lifestyles of their congregations, some synagogues began to reinvent themselves as community centers. As the intensive Jewish homelife of the immigrant generation waned, adults began to

[19] Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 103.
[20] Baum, *The Organization of Hope*, 21.
[21] Sandler, *Jewish Baltimore*, 8.
[22] Sandler, *Jewish Baltimore*, 8.
[23] Schein, *On Three Pillars, 165*.
[24] Ibid, 166.

attend late Friday evening services not just for worship but for "social interaction and communal fellowship."[25] This trend would expand significantly with the synagogue relocations to the suburbs after World War II.

By the 1930s Park Heights Avenue up to the city boundary was an elongated Jewish neighborhood. The extension of the streetcar lines made it possible for the area around Park Heights Avenue and Reisterstown Road to become bedroom communities for Jewish people working in downtown Baltimore. The Jewish population had been drawn to this area because of the affordable rowhouses, the friendly neighborhoods, and the abundance of drug stores and kosher butcher shops. In addition, while some residents moved prior to the relocation of the synagogues, many chose to live in the area after their synagogues had constructed new facilities nearby.[26] In 1938, a new orthodox congregation, Beth Jacob, formed on Park Heights and Manhattan Avenues and the reform Har Sinai built a suburban branch on Park Heights and Strathmore Avenues. In addition, they relocated their religious school uptown.[27] Throughout the following decades, Jewish life would be wholly transported to this area as the Jewish Community Center, Hebrew Schools, Baltimore Hebrew University, and agencies of the Associated Jewish Charities all relocated to the Park Heights neighborhood.[28]

An ongoing conflict within the Jewish community of Baltimore was whether to identify itself as a religious or an ethnic group. In medieval Europe Jewish communities were geographically defined and self-contained. The Enlightenment brought about the development of nation-states and Jewish communities subsequently began to define themselves based on the customs of their homelands. Throughout Germany, the forces of the Enlightenment caused an erosion of the established Jewish community and posited Jews as individual citizens. As a result, German-Jews began to think of themselves as a purely religious group similar to Catholics or Protestants. In Eastern Europe, though, there was a mix of national groups and the formation of nation-states occurred at a slower pace than in Germany. The Russian government also treated the Jewish population as a separate national, or ethnic, group. Throughout the twentieth century, distinct Jewish communities, commonly living in ghettos, existed across Eastern Europe. While their religious practices followed several centuries of tradition, religion was not the primary element in their Jewish identity.[29] In North America, German-Jews tended to adopt widespread American customs. This was especially visible in the reform congregations with liberal practices and patterns of worship. The Eastern European immigrants preferred to use more traditional religious practices and formed Orthodox congregations that were both religiously and socially similar to the institutions of small Eastern European Jewish settlements. As these newer immigrants began to adapt to American society, they sought out a more moderate form of worship. Conservative Judaism was created as a compromise between the strict Orthodox and the liberal Reform movements. While the practice of conservatism emerged in Philadelphia and New York around the turn of the century, Baltimore's conservative

[25] Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 166, 150-51.
[26] Sandler, *Jewish Baltimore*, 8 and 128.
[27] Schein, *On Three Pillars, 192.*
[28] Sandler, *Jewish Baltimore*, 206.
[29] Baum, *The Organization of Hope*, 22.

congregations grew mainly during the post-World War II period of suburbanization.[30] Today, conservative congregations generally belong to the United Synagogue of America, the liberal or reform congregations to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and orthodox to the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations.[31] The separation of the Jewish community by type of worship (conservative, reform, or orthodox) was reflected in their geographic distribution. The orthodox communities tended to remain in the Park Heights area, while the reform and conservative Jews lived in the adjacent northwest suburbs.[32] Although the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation and Temple Oheb Shalom are located within the City of Baltimore, they are generally thought of as located in the northwest suburbs along with other Conservative and Reform congregations, such as Chizuk Amuno, and Beth El.

By 1947 there were 80,0000 Jews living in the greater Baltimore area (as estimated by the Baltimore Jewish Council.[33]) In this post-war period, a sense of nationalism emerged in America. This had a positive effect on the relationship between the German and Eastern European Jewish communities. Throughout the following decades the groups would work together on a variety of issues including buffering the criticism of the Christian community in the 1950s and eliminating the use of restrictive covenants to limit the rights of Jews in property ownership (declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1953).[34]

Suburbanization of American Judaism

In Baltimore, the shift to suburban Judaism was particularly dramatic and epitomized a national phenomenon of relocating to the vast open spaces of the suburbs and constructing large synagogue complexes. After World War II, most new residential development occurred in bands and corridors around established urban centers. Deconcentration challenged organized Judaism in that it dispersed congregation members over a wider area, distributing households in far more integrated neighborhoods that provided little natural support for Jewish identification or traditional lifeways.[35] Synagogues filled this void through the provision of all-encompassing social, educational, and worship centers. As a result, many synagogues experienced an increase in membership and were forced to assess their facilities. How could all the new worshippers be accommodated, especially on High Holidays? Should existing structures be modified or should new synagogues be constructed? What aesthetic environment would best reflect the new religious reality of American Jewish life?[36] In order to answer these questions successfully, congregations developed what was essentially a new building type – the Modern synagogue complex.

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[30] Ibid, 22-23.
[31] Paul Thiry, Richard M. Bennett and Henry L. Kamphoefner, *Churches and Temples*, New York: 1953, 19J.
[32] Baum, *The Organization of Hope*, 23.
[33] Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 228.
[34] Phillip Kahn, *Uncommon Threads: Threads That Were the Fabric of Baltimore Jewish Life*, Baltimore: 1996, 221.
[35] Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 228.
[36] Lance J. Sussman, "The Suburbanization of American Judaism as Reflected in Synagogue Buildings and Architecture, 1945-1975," *American Jewish History* 73 (September 1985): 31.

Modernism was chosen as the most appropriate architectural style for these new complexes for a number of reasons. The suburban synagogues represented a completely new building form in a growing suburban landscape. As suburban locales gained political power and independence, the residents often desired to separate themselves from "old" traditions. One method of doing so involved turning to Modernism as the principal architectural style – especially for prominent social and community buildings such as religious structures – including synagogues. Modern architecture at its best offered the ability to merge the multifunctional practical requirements of the building with a design expressive of its symbolic purpose.[37] In many cases, the lay leaders and prominent patrons of the congregations influenced both the functions and designs of the new buildings. They have asked for "social halls, stages for dramatic performances, art galleries, swimming pools, classrooms, libraries, museums, meeting rooms, and kitchens.[38] At Baltimore Hebrew Congregation the Rothschild family, who were also patrons of the avant-garde in art and music, appear to have influenced design decisions; artist Amalie Rothschild, for example, designed the tapestries covering the Ark in the sanctuary. Another rationale for selecting Modernism related to the progressive thinking and liberal attitudes associated with Reform congregations. As national Jewish organizations began to support Modern designs for Reform synagogues, the typology quickly spread throughout the entire Jewish community as a method of giving the synagogue a unique and outwardly recognizable architectural form.

Collectively, Jewish leaders, architects, and artists concluded that a new synagogue form was necessary to symbolize the arrival of Judaism in the suburbs. In addition, a bold and Modern synagogue design reaffirmed publicly the Jewish community's right to assert their collective heritage and identity, particularly in light of the persecutions before and during the European war.[39] European architects immigrating to the United States, such as Walter Gropius, who designed Temple Oheb Shalom, brought a more functionalist approach to architecture with them. By the end of the 1940s, a new synagogue form had emerged. The design was distinctly suburban and unique from synagogues of the pre-war period. The new synagogue complex was a symbol of suburbia, and it actively nurtured the family values associated with it. It incorporated programs that promoted the values of recreation and a youth-oriented society. Some general characteristics of the suburban synagogue included an overall sense of "newness" expressed in the furniture, light fixtures, Torah covers and candelabras; increased accessibility by the automobile; and the availability of an expansive setting with large lawns and attractive landscaping.[40] In addition, the suburban synagogue had to accommodate a sprawling, multifunctional complex and room to park cars, and therefore demanded larger plots of land than were generally available within the city.

From 1945 to 1975, an impressive number of suburban-style Modern synagogues were constructed across the United States. In the post-Holocaust period, there was a determined revival of faith, especially within the Jewish community, which brought unprecedented numbers of worshippers into existing synagogues. This

[37] Avram Kampf, Contemporary Synagogue Art: Developments in the United States, 1945-1965 (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1966), 28.
[38] Ibid., 25.
[39] Brian de Breffny, The Synagogue (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 192.
[40] Sussman, "The Suburbanization of American Judaism as Reflected in Synagogue Buildings and Architecture, 1945-1975," 31-32.

caused overcrowding among congregations, and led many of them to construct new facilities. In this period of widespread construction, "it might even be asserted that building new synagogues constituted the central religious activity of American Jews."[41] This building boom brought the United States to the forefront in modern synagogue architectural design.[42] Baltimore synagogues played a prominent role in that process

Before World War II, American synagogues generally followed the plans and techniques of Christian churches.[43] Architects in Europe, however, began experimenting with new styles, flexible spaces, and new building materials in synagogue design as early as the 1920s and 1930s. Although architectural innovation nearly ceased in Europe as congregations focused on the war and the unfolding Holocaust, it sprang forth with renewed vigor in the United States after the war, as the role of the synagogue in daily life transformed to suit the needs of the new suburban population.[44]

The idea that the synagogue could serve the cultural and social needs, as well as the spiritual needs, of the Jewish community arose out of the conditions of the American urban environment. The "Jewish American" movement, which emerged in second and third tier settlements throughout cities in the early twentieth century, promoted a new type of Jewish community that was based primarily on ethnicity.[45] The ideas of Mordecai Kaplan, who believed that Judaism was more than a religion and encompassed a civilization that included language, culture, and customs, promoted the concept of a "synagogue center" offering religious services, study programs, drama, dance, song, sports, and exercise in an effort to retain young Jews in the congregations and reduce the amount of intermarriage. Mordecai Kaplan was born in Lithuania in 1881, where he received a traditional Jewish education. He came to the United States in 1889.[46]

According to Lance Sussman, in the post-war period of suburbanization, America "changed from the land of immigrants, with its thriving ethnic groups, to the triple melting pot in which people tend[ed] more and more to identify and locate themselves in terms of three great sub-communities – Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish – defined in religious terms."[47] As one of these emerging sub-communities, the Jews found themselves as guardians of one-third of the American religious heritage, though only comprising 3.2% of the total American population. These empowered Jews quickly found their synagogues, as both institutions and physical

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[41] Ibid, 32.
[42] de Breffny, The Synagogue, 196.
[43] H.A. Meek, The Synagogue (London: Phaidon, 1995), 227.
[44] Sussman, 33-35.
[45] Ibid, 35-36.
[46] "Mordecai Kaplan: Founder of Reconstructionism," *Rabbi Sheinerman's Home Page* [on-line], available at: http://sheinerman.net/judaism/personalities/kaplan.html, 2003.
Modecai Kaplan graduated from the City College of New York, was ordained at the conservative Jewish Theological Seminary, and received a master's degree from Columbia University. In addition, he served as an associate rabbi for an Orthodox synagogue in New York and taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He became disenchanted with orthodox theology and interested in alternative approaches to Judaism Over time the new social science field of sociology and the progress in the physical sciences influenced Kaplan. In 1935 he authored *Judaism as a Civilization*, which became the foundation of the Reconstructionist movement.
[47] Sussman, "The Suburbanization of American Judaism as Reflected in Synagogue Buildings and Architecture, 1945-1975," 36.

structures, inadequate to serve as symbols of their cultural heritage.[48] Individual congregations, and their national umbrella organizations, turned to architects, many of whom were Jewish, to create a new building type of suburban synagogues. After 1945, there was a widespread belief throughout the Jewish community that a "true" Jewish style in art and architecture was about to be created and that the synagogue would become a distinctly Jewish building. The Reform movement took the leading role in the architectural development of the suburban synagogue because of its large financial resources and its tradition of reforming the standards of Jewish thought. In 1946, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the national organization of Reform Judaism, published a guide for congregations considering relocating to the suburbs. The following year, the UAHC sponsored two conferences on synagogue architecture. The UAHC also organized a panel of synagogue architects who traveled throughout the country to meet with congregation building committees. The panel developed a series of guidelines for new synagogue construction, which was subsequently published by the UAHC. In addition, the UAHC published, in 1954, the landmark book, *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guidebook to Synagogue Design and Construction*. The book was edited by Peter Blake, a well known critic and architect, and included writings from a variety of religious leaders and architects (including Daniel Schwartzman, the architect of Chizuk Amuno).[49]

While the UAHC promoted synagogue architecture at the national level, architects who promoted synagogue design in their professional organizations and journals were contacted by individual congregations. Eric Mendelsohn (1887-1953) and Percival Goodman (1904-1989) were the two architects who had the greatest influence on the design and style of American suburban synagogues after 1945. Mendelsohn established trends in the design of large synagogues and experimented in the use of new building materials. His career began in Germany in the 1920s and was pursued in England and the British State of Palestine. Mendelsohn moved to the United States in 1945 and was involved in synagogue architecture until his death in 1953. Goodman, on the other hand, made major contributions to the design and style of smaller synagogues. From the readings of Martin Buber, a Jewish philosopher and theologian, he developed ideas of intimacy in synagogue construction. His most lasting contribution to synagogue design is possibly the emphasis on the Ark as an external feature, which he thought had the possibility to define a building as a synagogue to the general public.[50]

Some architects during the post-war period attempted to transform the suburban synagogue structure into a literal symbol of Judaism, through such methods as devising plans in the form of the Star of David. In most cases, though, such symbolism was not apparent from the interior of the structures or was so abstract that it was not recognized by most congregants. The post-war synagogues also incorporated general trends of religious institutions of any denomination. For example, architects and planners incorporated multifunctional spaces into their redesigns of synagogues. One of the most notable new features of the suburban synagogue was the expandable sanctuary, which provided additional seating for the High Holidays. Spatial flexibility was employed by linking the sanctuary with the social hall. The presence of an imposing social hall reinforced the

[48] Ibid, 36.
[49] Ibid, 37-38.
[50] Ibid, 39-40.

concept that Judaism was more than just a religion; it was an all-encompassing way of life. Usually equipped with a kitchen and a stage, it could be used for a variety of activities. The religious school was closely modeled after public school buildings and usually did not have any features that identified it as Jewish (the same is true for Catholic schools). For the most part, synagogue schools followed state-wide and national trends towards the use of Modern architecture for new school facilities. Central offices became a noticeable feature of large synagogues, a reflection of the bureaucratic needs of suburban congregations and on the important role granted to office work in the post-war American society.[51]

Suburban Relocation of Baltimore Congregations

The post-war years marked the beginnings of the eventual suburban relocation of most of Baltimore's synagogues. By 1946, one out of every six Americans lived in the suburbs. The rapid spread of new suburbs after the war created an instant building boom of residential, educational, and religious structures (including synagogues), all adopting similar design concepts. In the new communities, the synagogue complexes were typically the only operating Jewish agencies and they truly became the geographic center of Jewish life. As such, new designs that allowed for programmatic flexibility were necessary. As early as the 1940s, plans emerged that included features such as movable partitions and sliding doors that would allow for the conversion of spaces for a variety of uses.[52]

By the end of World War II, Baltimore's German Reform Jews had moved from the mid-town northeast into Upper Park Heights; Eastern European Jews still living in East Baltimore migrated to the newly vacated residences.[53] Throughout the late 1940s the generations reaching adulthood continued to leave the urban area. In general, they relocated to the suburbs where they hoped to "raise their children in single-family homes nestled among green lawns and open areas."[54] With the suburban migration, though, came a loss of the tightly knit Jewish community that had existed in the dense urban neighborhoods. The suburban synagogue complex, with its social, educational, and worship spaces, was designed to provide a surrogate community to its members.[55]

Three of the prominent Reform congregations, Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, Har Sinai, and Temple Oheb Shalom, began discussions for relocation plans as early as 1940. Their desire was to move closer to their members who lived at the time in the Pikesville and Stevenson areas. The synagogue leaders collectively understood that they would have to follow their members in order to survive. This was a lesson learned from the Hebrew Friendship Congregation that, after the Civil War, refused to follow their members out of East

[51] Ibid 40-43.
[52] Rachel Wishnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture in the United States: History and Interpretation* (Philadelphia: 1955).
[53] Kahn, *Uncommon Threads*, 222.
[54] Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 228.
[55] Ibid 229.

Baltimore and eventually had to disband the synagogue.[56] Throughout the 1950s and 1960s Jewish families in Baltimore continued to settle and relocate to the northwest suburbs and the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation was the first reform congregation to relocate in 1951. Har Sinai followed in 1959 with a new complex at Park Heights Avenue and Fords Lane, while Temple Oheb Shalom moved to its new complex on the west side of Park Heights in 1961.[57]

The conservative congregations in Baltimore gained popularity in the post-war period. They appealed to young people because they allowed their members to fully participate in a secular life while still maintaining their religious lives. As a result, not only did the conservative congregations have to accommodate a shift to suburban locations, but also a growing membership. As Schein notes, "nationally, migration to suburban areas, coupled with increasing interest in the middle of the road policies of the Conservative movement, had created an explosion of new congregations."[58] The largest conservative congregation in Baltimore, Chizuk Amuno, relocated to Baltimore County in 1961.[59] Twenty families that were displeased with the strict ideologies of the Orthodox Beth Tfiloh synagogue formed an additional conservative congregation, Beth El, in 1947. Although Beth El's first site was near Taney Road, many members soon moved outward. Their first synagogue complex, erected by the congregation in 1960, was north of the city line on Park Heights Avenue, directly behind the Chizuk Amuno site.[60]

Other Jewish facilities soon followed suit. In 1958 the Baltimore Hebrew College relocated to 5800 Park Heights Avenue. Two years later the Jewish Community Center moved to a facility at 5700 Park Heights Avenue. By 1968 there were 106,300 Jews living in greater Baltimore, comprising almost 7% of the total population of the city. Out of this Jewish community, 47% lived in suburban locations. The greatest concentration was in the Upper Park Heights community, with 35.8% of the total Jewish population. In addition, 29.2% lived in Liberty, 14.6% in the Reb Corridor, 10.9% in Lower Park Heights, 5.2% in the downtown, and an additional 4.3% lived in other outlying areas. The Lower Park Heights neighborhood was predominantly Orthodox (55%), while the other communities had a more balanced distribution. Upper Park Heights, with the largest concentration of Jewish residents, was 35% Orthodox, 29% Conservative, and 31% Reform.[61]

Trends in Synagogue Design

The synagogue, from the Greek "sinago", or "to gather", has a triple function in Jewish life. It serves as the house of prayer, house of study, and house of assembly. In other words, the synagogue provides space for

[56] Kahn, *Uncommon Threads*, 222-223.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Schein, *On Three Pillars*, 274.
[59] Kahn, *Uncommon Threads*, 224-225.
[60] Ibid.
[61] "The Jewish Community of Greater Baltimore: A Population Study," completed by the Associated Jewish Chamber of Baltimore, 1968.

worship, educational facilities, and social gathering places.[62] In the introduction to a 1963 exhibit entitled *Recent American Synagogue Architecture*, Richard Meier describes this typology as the Jewish people's "most original creation, the mainstay of their cohesiveness, assuring the survival of their group, their cultural identity, and their historical cohesiveness."[63] There have never been any standard definitions or prescribed protocols for synagogue design. While certain implications about the form of the synagogue have been extracted from the Bible, there is no set of rules that architects or congregations must follow. Synagogues thus become an individualized, outward expression of the congregation. In arriving at this end, it is "the problem of the synagogue architect to express in a physical structure the spirit of the Jewish congregation."[64]

The earliest designs for synagogues were by today's standards "a grassroot, democratic form springing up from and encouraging individual initiative and responsibility based on a common understanding of basic needs."[65] Although there are no prescriptions for designing a synagogue, there are some common elements among congregations. The Torah, the most valuable element in the sanctuary, is a "copy of Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, handwritten on parchment about twenty inches high and a foot in diameter."[66] The second ritual element is the Ark, in which the Torah is stored. In addition, an Eternal Light always hangs near the Ark. Other traditional features include a seven-branch candelabra that hangs on one or both sides of the Ark and a representation of the Tablets of Law above the Ark.[67]

The sanctuary of the synagogue is designed with the bema in front of the Ark. The bema should be, but is not always, elevated with three steps. On the bema there is a reading desk, or pulpit, that is used to place the Torah on when unrolled. There is a great amount of flexibility in the arrangement of the bema. Some common patterns consist of placing one reading desk in the center of the bema, in front of the Ark, one unit to either side of the Ark, a mobile unit that can sit in different locations depending on the service, or two separate pulpits on either side of the bema. There are no further guidelines for the shape or dimensions of the sanctuary as a whole.[68] Prior to entering the sanctuary, there is generally a foyer, or gathering space, which functions as the central core of the complex. Generally, all areas of the synagogue facility are accessible from this space.

Historically, Jewish communities have built synagogues that follow the dominant architectural style of the time. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, congregations borrowed the forms of the Greek temple, Moorish mosque, Gothic cathedral, Romanesque church, and even the colonial American church.[69] Early on in America, the immigrant origins of the congregations, along with their religious views and economic conditions, were the dominating factors in synagogue design. Although the Jewish population in America

[62] Meier, 11.
[63] Meier, 13.
[64] Meier, 10.
[65] Thiry, *Churches and Temples*, 6J.
[66] Ibid, 19J.
[67] Ibid, 20J.
[68] Ibid, 22J.
[69] Meier, 7.

began to flourish in the early 1800s, there were no professional architects or designers within the Jewish community until the 1840s.[70]

Although Jews had settled in America as early as the mid-seventeenth century, it was not until 1730 that the first building was constructed specifically for Jewish worship in New York City. By 1825, Jewish congregations were worshipping in their own buildings in many of the larger cities in the new nation. At this time, neoclassicism was the typical choice for many synagogue designers. The growth of the Jewish population around the mid-nineteenth century directly led to an increased need for houses of worship. Many Jews crowded into urbanized areas and replaced pre-existing Christian communities. Jews commonly acquired former church structures, many of them Gothic in design, and converted them for Jewish liturgical use. The Romanesque revival style was also used for synagogues in the period before the Civil War.[71]

By the mid-1800s, German Jews began to prosper along the Eastern seaboard. As the community organized into distinct congregations, they began to show concern over distinctive features in their synagogue buildings. While synagogues do not have any display of an image or symbol that is thought to have "supernatural" power, the German Jews were the first group to display common Jewish symbols on the exteriors of their buildings. The Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, in 1845, was the first synagogue in the United States to display the Star of David on a building; it was visible in one of the synagogue's windows.

Beginning after the Civil War and continuing into the twentieth century, synagogues used Islamic motifs, including Moorish minarets and horseshoe-arched facades. This style was easily differentiated from church design at the time and created a desired visual identification for the minority Jewish groups. However, the Moorish style lacked any true identification with Judaism and remained alien to American sensibilities. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a new interest in the planning of the synagogue emerged. There was a shift from the basilican plan, which had characterized Moorish synagogues, to a more central orientation. The dome is the architectural form that was most often used to emphasize this new approach. Then in the early twentieth century synagogue architecture experienced a new phase. The archeological discovery of ancient synagogues in Galilee justified the use of Greco-Roman designs. Although antiquity became the most popular reference in the first quarter of the twentieth century, other historical periods were also represented.[72]

During the 1920s, many of the historical elements that characterized synagogues were derived from Byzantine architecture. The layout of Byzantine churches could easily be adapted to a centrally planned synagogue. Another advantage was the characteristic simplicity in the block-like forms of a polygonal Byzantine structure. Although new advances in technology had freed architecture of the load-bearing wall and massive stone buttress, synagogues in the 1920s continued to feature these traditional forms. The onset of the Great

[70] Rachel Wishnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture in the United States*.
[71] *Two Hundred Years of Synagogue Architecture* (Waltham, Mass: 1976), 9-13.
[72] Ibid, 13-17.

Depression in the 1930s brought a virtual halt to synagogue construction in the United States, although experimentation with new forms continued throughout Europe.[73]

The earliest synagogues in America were generally single buildings, with the primary space dedicated to worship, and smaller rooms for educational and social functions. Due to their urban locations, many of the social gatherings for the congregation could be held at other nearby locations. Beginning in the 1920s, as households left the traditional neighborhoods behind, a trend to build Jewish centers emerged in an effort to provide for the social and cultural needs of the congregation. These synagogue centers existed in addition to the broad-based, community-oriented Jewish Social Centers that served the community at large.[74]

During World War II, architects in the United States began experimenting with the concept of multi-purpose space and flexible design for synagogues. The most common flexible space included in modern synagogues was the combination of the sanctuary and social hall. The social hall was almost always included in synagogue design, illustrating the importance of the festive meals in celebration of the various Jewish holidays. To provide increased seating flexibility, particularly in smaller synagogues, this space was often situated adjacent to the sanctuary and separated with a removable wall. Other common elements in modern synagogue complexes were classrooms, administrative offices, a library, memorial walls, the mechanical plant, and kitchen(s). Additional gathering space was also commonly provided by the inclusion of an outdoor courtyard.[75]

After World War II, there was a popular revolution in American spirituality. After the Holocaust, many American Jews renewed their religious and cultural identity. This increase in membership and changing demographics led to an unprecedented number of newly constructed synagogues. During this building frenzy, architects in the U.S. began to use the idiom of the Modern Movement in synagogue design, which was influenced by the architectural experimentation of pre-war Europe. Eric Mendelsohn, a German born architect, was the first to produce an outstanding post-World War II synagogue, the Congregation B'nai Amoona in St. Louis (c.1946).[76] Its layout enabled the seating capacity to be doubled for the high holidays by linking the prayer hall, foyer, and auditorium with folding walls. This "flexible plan" was revolutionary at the time.[77]

There were still no standard rules for exterior synagogue design, except that "Biblical law says the orientation should be toward Jerusalem" and that the "synagogue should be on the highest land in the community and should be the highest building."[78] Also common on the exterior are two freestanding columns flanking the main entrance to the building. Paul Thiry, in his discussion of synagogue design, notes that contemporary synagogues "are planned so that each of the various parts expresses its own essential spirit: sanctuaries, the

[73] Ibid, 17.
[74] Rachel Wishnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture in the United States*.
[75] Thiry, *Churches and Temples*, 23-25J.
[76] Information on the B'nai Amoona synagogue can be found in Kathleen James' *In the Spirit of Our Age: Eric Mendelsohn's B'nai Amoona Synagogue* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2000).
[77] *Two Hundred Years of American Synagogue Architecture*, 30.
[78] Thiry, *Churches and Temples*, 25J.

center of religious life, tend to express mass and, by means of greater height, to dominate other elements; social halls, often larger in area than the prayer hall, are usually endowed with greater glass areas which let in light and create a cheerful atmosphere; and the educational and administrative functions are revealed as spreading, many-windowed wings."[79]

Percival Goodman, one of the most prominent modernist synagogue architects, believed there were five key elements to successful synagogue design. First, he emphasized that the tradition of the congregation and their service should "establish the whole tone and feeling of the building." In addition, the best skills, most advanced engineering, and best materials should be employed. Intimacy was essential. The design of the sanctuary should allow as many people as possible to sit as close as possible to the bema. Goodman also believed that there was no substantial difference in the sanctity of the parts of the synagogue and that the educational, social, and worship spaces should all receive equal emphasis. The only ritual element that Goodman called for is to have two menorahs flanking the Ark.[80]

The post-war trends in synagogue design are highly significant and represent a genuine change in the design of synagogues. In the years following World War II, the suburban version of the synagogue complex was elaborated and there was a dramatic turn to Modernism as the architectural solution for the new buildings. By the mid-twentieth century, Jews no longer accepted structures that were not representative of their heritage. Jewish services in a Gothic atmosphere seemed anachronistic. The lack of traditional temple architecture enabled Modernism to become the language of the suburban synagogues of the new American Jewish communities.[81] Another trend after WWII was synagogue complexes that included "monumental" chapels, which were clearly distinct religious spaces. Frank Lloyd Wright's Temple Beth Shalom (c.1956) in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania was the most publicized post-war synagogue. The plan resembled the Star of David and the building had a tripod roof, which Wright hoped would suggest both Mount Sinai and the tent tabernacles of the ancient Hebrews. This tent theme is the most popular idiom in modern American synagogue architecture. Symbolic programs went hand in hand with these historical allusions. Generally, these building types were not as successful because their form was compromised in order to exhibit their chosen symbol.[82]

The Baltimore Hebrew Congregation's suburban synagogue complex represents the beginning of a national trend towards a new building form for Jewish religious structures. Constructed in the late 1940s, it was one of the earliest Modernist synagogues in both the mid-Atlantic region and in the nation as a whole. It set a standard for excellence in expression that the other new Baltimore suburban synagogue complexes emulated in spirit if not in the precise details of design. One of Percival Goodman's remarkable achievements in architecture, Baltimore Hebrew Congregation is extensively highlighted in Elman and Giral's *Percival Goodman: architect – planner – teacher – painter*, a text highlighting the work of this master architect. The congregation has long

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[79] Ibid.
[80] *Recent American Synagogue Architecture* (New York: 1963), 21.
[81] Matthew Fitzsimmons, *The Baltimore Hebrew Congregation* (College Park, Md: 2002), 7.
[82] *Recent American Synagogue Architecture*, 31-33.

been recognized nationally as one of the most important in American Jewish history. It was the first congregation in Baltimore, a city known for its prominent place in American Judaism, and it blazed the trail for Chizuk Amuno, Beth El, and Temple Oheb Shalom in the postwar suburban era.

Artwork in Synagogues

Traditionally, there are three main types of artwork in the synagogue: symbols, ritual objects, and decorative works. Paul Thiry, Richard M. Bennett, and Henry L. Kamphoefner in *Churches and Temples* mention that "only the artist can revitalize the familiar objects and images so that they convey a meaning and a feeling transcending the inherent reality of the devices themselves."[83] Most designers of synagogue artwork use functional objects to represent Jewish symbols and concepts, but there is the need for the artist to express the deeper purposes they embody. As architectural historian Avram Kampf points out, Modernist synagogues in particular, because of the strictly rationalized principles of their design, "need the intensification of the meaning of the building, the externalization of its spirit; they need some of the warmth, eloquence and passion of an individual work of art."[84]

Particularly as the synagogue has become a multi-functional complex in which the prayer hall is but one component, art has come to play increasingly prominent roles in its cultural and religious expression. To begin with, art fulfills the traditional need for "Hiddur Mitzvah (the artistic work which is done to adorn religious objects and actions)." In addition to artistic expression that will stimulate worship, many congregations desire an environment appropriately indicative of the social status of the congregants. Then, too, artistic works such as sculpture and the embellishment of the synagogue doors enable congregations to identify with and to announce themselves to the surrounding community. Art can also express "communal pride and personal identification with the synagogue," particularly when it captures the values and spirit of a congregation. Many lay leaders believe art should form part of the educational program and become, for example, a meaningful activity that children learn from. Still others "seek an art which is relevant, which increases consciousness of belonging, spiritual awareness, [and] an historical understanding of the group." Thus art comes into the mid-twentieth century Modern synagogue as an activity directed toward increasing communality, assisting the traditional requirements of the worship service, creating a stimulating and inviting environment, and incorporating new cultural activities into the increasing complex program it sponsors.[85]

Modern art has struck a resonant chord for many mid-century suburban congregations in the United States. Its sources of appeal are varied. For some congregants who uphold the prohibition of the Second Commandment, abstract art is more palatable than traditions of classical representation. As the dominant art form at the time, modern art placed "the synagogue within the main stream of modern life." In its various manifestations,

[83] Thiry, *Churches and Temples,* 34J.
[84] Kampf, *Contemporary Synagogue Art* ,30.
[85] Ibid., 26.

modern art is capable of communicating important truths and inward states of mind with great effectiveness. Suburban synagogues possess examples of contemporary art that express a range of themes from traditional biblical symbols, such as the burning bush, the revelation on Mt. Sinai, and the menorah, to ideas of spirituality and mystery, democratic ideals of social justice, and the Jewish peoples' struggle for acceptance.[86] Works of art manifest on the exteriors of buildings—as sculpture, mosaics, murals, pylons, or inscriptions; in vestibules—where they help prepare worshippers for the more spiritual mood of the prayer hall; in worship spaces—especially adorning ritual objects, such as the Ark, the Torah, the Eternal Light, Menorahs, and stained glass; and in galleries, museums, memorial walls, educational spaces, and sometimes social halls.[87] Perhaps the quintessential example of the integration of art and architecture in a mid-century synagogue is Percival Goodman's Congregation B'nai Israel in Millburn, New Jersey (1951). There Goodman selected three struggling abstract artists to enhance a modest synagogue he had designed in the outer suburbs of New York City. Among the striking results were Herbert Ferber's dramatic sculpture of the Burning Bush on the exterior façade, Robert Motherwell's semi-abstract decorative mural in the vestibule, and Adolph Gottlieb's Torah curtain in velvet appliqué.[88] A similar quality of the integration of art and architecture seen in B'nai Israel is achieved in different ways in Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, Chizuk Amuno, Beth El, and Temple Oheb Shalom in suburban Baltimore.

History of the Beth El Congregation

The Beth El Congregation was established in the late 1940s when a small group of prominent members at the Orthodox Beth Tfiloh Congregation wanted to reform their worship practices. Specifically they wanted to end the tradition of separate seating by gender during services and expand the bat mitzvah rituals. The rabbi of Beth Tfiloh at the time refused to officially align that congregation with Conservatism. When Beth Tfiloh did not move in the direction these members hoped for, they broke off and formed the Beth El Congregation. The official birth of Beth El occurred on January 13, 1948. It was the first synagogue in Baltimore to be founded as a Conservative congregation and from the onset was affiliated with the United Synagogue.[89]

The founders of Beth El were guided by two key principles. The first was to create a shared ideological understanding within the congregation. To fulfill this goal, the founders became educated, with the assistance of outside scholars, on the message and ideology of Conservatism. Some of the specific issues focused on were Mitzvah and Jewish law, the evolving role of women, and modern views of worship. The second principle that the founders believed in was to do no harm to their former synagogue, the Beth Tfiloh Congregation. As a result, all of the defectors fulfilled all pledge and donation commitments that had already been promised. The

[86] Ibid., 54.
[87] Ibid, 88, 125, 140-173.
[88] Ibid., 75-86.
[89] Currently in Baltimore there are three Reform congregations (Baltimore Hebrew, Har Sinai, and Temple Oheb Shalom), five Conservative congregations (Beth Am, Beth El, Bolton Street, Chevrei Tzedek, and Chizuk Amuno), and twenty-eight Orthodox congregations.

founding members also wished to create an intimate synagogue, a small, "family congregation," of no more than 200 or 300 families.[90]

When the fifty or so families became dissatisfied with Beth Tfiloh, they approached Solomon Goldman, a nationally prominent Conservative leader, for advice on forming an official Conservative congregation. Goldman was a friend of Jacob Agus, whom he recommended as the first rabbi of the young synagogue. Agus was officially elected on February 3, 1950 and delivered his first service on June 1, 1950.

The founding of Beth El helped to strengthen the Conservative denomination in Baltimore, which to this day only has five congregations. Rabbi Loeb noted that "the early 1950s was the time when the Conservative movement became the largest American Jewish religious movement, and Baltimore was a major Jewish community, numbering close to ninety thousand Jews."[91] During this period, the Jewish community in Baltimore continued to expand. With the more politically liberal Jewish population in the northwest suburbs, a new demand for a Conservative congregation emerged.

Soon after the congregation formed, a committee was appointed to search for appropriate sites for a permanent synagogue building. The committee found a site at Dorithan and Hilton Roads, in northwest Baltimore City[92] and retained the services of prominent synagogue architect, Erich Mendelsohn (1887-1953), to plan the new facility. On January 14, 1951, the third anniversary of the founders' dinner, the congregation dedicated its first school building and social hall, a three story building.[93] The school was a three-story structure that served 375 children.[94] In 1957, Beth El acquired its Memorial Park, located in the 9700 block of Liberty Road in Baltimore County. The property was formerly owned by the Tifereth Israel Cemetery and encompassed 31.5 acres. On November 3, 1968, the congregation rededicated the Memorial Park, which now included roads, gates, a chapel, and a meditation area.

Development of the Suburban Synagogue Complex

As opposed to older congregations in Baltimore, Beth El has always been located in a suburban environment. Although they had just begun a facility in 1951, the continued out-migration of the members thwarted the congregation's plans to expand in the existing location. The congregation appointed a committee to search for a new location that would be suitable for a large synagogue complex. A number of locations were considered, including the former Kohn Estate, which is now occupied by Northwestern High School. The congregation

[90] "Beth El Congregation's 50th Anniversary Book," (Baltimore, MD: Beth El Congregation, 1999), 13.
[91] Steven T. Katz, *American Rabbi: The Life and Thought of Jacob B. Agus* (New York: 1997).
[92] This location was much more urban than the final suburban synagogue location on Park Heights Avenue.
[93] Although Mendelsohn developed an elaborate and impressive design for an entire Community Center containing social, educational, and worship spaces, only a school wing and social hall were built.. See Bruno Zevi, *Erich Mendelsohn: the complete works* (Basel: Birkhaeuser Publishers, 1999), 322-330.
[94] "Construction Work Started on Beth El Synagogue," *Baltimore Evening Sun*, 23 Jul. 1949.

purchased a 22.9-acre tract on Park Heights Avenue near Hooks Lane for a total of $165,000."[95] The new location was directly behind the Chizuk Amuno property and was formerly known as the Barton Estate. The final decision to relocate to the Park Heights property was made in June 1959, and the architect Sigmund Braverman was retained to design the new complex, comprised of three interconnected components – a sanctuary, social auditorium, and educational facility. Previously, Sigmund Braverman had worked in Ohio, primarily in Cleveland. There he had designed both urban and suburban synagogues. Mendelsohn was not involved in the planning and design of the second synagogue and had passed away six years prior to Beth El's decision to relocate. The plan for the new building included space for the multiple functions of a suburban synagogue complex – worship, education, administration, and social space. As such, the building was attempting to create the rich Jewish cultural environment that would enable the synagogue to meet a comprehensive set of needs for families in the congregation.

The land was purchased for the new complex in 1959 and Braverman was commissioned in that same year. Groundbreaking took place on June 7, 1959 with Cogswell Construction serving as the general contractor for the project. The cornerstone for the new facility was laid in 1959 and was dedicated by Rabbi Jacob B. Agus. The complex was dedicated on September 11, 1960 at a final cost of two million dollars. The design won the Craftsmanship Award from the Building Congress and Exchange of Baltimore in 1961. After the new building opened, Beth El reopened its membership rolls (it had grown to capacity at its previous facility and had stopped accepting new members) and eventually grew to a congregation of more than 1,500 families.

The sanctuary of the new complex seated 1,440 worshippers and included an Ark made of Israeli-mined marble. The sanctuary was placed in the center of the complex, with the school to the right and the social space to the left (if looking from Park Heights Avenue). The main foyer is in front of the sanctuary. One wing of the elegant, central curvilinear spine leads to the school building and the other leads to the auditorium and administration area. The auditorium included a stage for plays and cultural programs and was often used for dinners, banquets, receptions, dances, and other social gatherings. An additional auditorium was included in the original educational wing. This space was commonly used for Sabbath services, Sunday school, and mid-week programs. Other facilities included in the design were a chapel for daily prayer, bridal room, parlor, library, teacher's parlor, board of trustees' room, and sisterhood and men's club parlors. Below the school wing, the building included a basement with space for a youth activities room, kindergarten, nursery room, and additional classrooms. The administration building had a rabbi's study, assistant rabbi's study, cantor's study, executive director's office, educational director's office, and a general office. By 1962, the congregation was fully established in the new facility and served approximately 600 children in the attached school building.

Rabbi Agus was extremely involved in the entire design process and provided the "architectural and artistic inspiration for the suburban building, arguably one of the most beautiful synagogues in the country".[96] Rabbi Loeb notes that Agus' "conceptualization of the sanctuary focused on Jewish learning: a mixture of large,

[95] *Beth El Congregation's 50th Anniversary Book* (Baltimore, Md: 1999).
[96] Steven T. Katz, *American Rabbi* (New York: 1997), 231.

stained-glass 'Bible windows'; 'Mishnah windows', which depicted the themes of the Sedarim of the Mishnah; and 'Talmud apertures,' which, together with the other windows, signified the triadic unity of Jewish knowledge."[97] In addition to his influence over the design of the sanctuary, Rabbi Agus also worked closely with Sigmund Braverman on the overall design, layout, and functions of the new complex. To be closer to the new synagogue, Rabbi Agus and his family moved in 1960 to a new home in the same suburban community as the complex.

Additions & Alterations to the Beth El Complex

Since the construction of the original synagogue complex in 1960, a series of alterations have taken place. For the most part, these alterations reflect the growth of the congregation, the need for additional educational space, and repairs to damaged portions of the complex. In 1979, a Memorial Wall was installed inside the original Bluefield Chapel. An additional Memorial Wall was installed outside the sanctuary along the curvilinear hallway in October 1986. The Memorial Wall contains plaques that family members or others can purchase when a congregant passes. Two years later, in February 1988, the Weinstein Mikvah opened. It is the only Conservative Mikvah in Baltimore and is used for traditional requirements and conversions.[98] The Mikvah is located towards the rear of the complex, adjacent to the educational wing. It is accessible only from the outside, so that it can be used by both Conservative and Orthodox congregations.[99]

Beth El has continuously operated an afternoon religious school. By 1985, the school enrollment had grown to 800 students and the congregation began to draft plans to expand the building. The new school building was dedicated in October 1987 and included the Pauline Mash School for Early Childhood Education, the Asus Library, the Kolker Seminar Room, the Joseph and Corrine Schwartz Education Center, and the Mollie G. Myers Auditorium. As the education programs and school enrollment continued to grow, expansion was needed again. In 1997, the congregation decided to add on to the education wing and planned the construction of the Sol and Carlyn Hubert Educational Building with seven new classrooms. The Berman-Lipavsky Religious School was formally dedicated on June 7, 1998.[100] These later additions to the school building generally follow the character of the building designed by Braverman. They continuously extend the facility to the south and use the same exterior materials as the original structure. Thus Beth El's changing shape accurately and organically reflects the values, character, and changing needs of the suburban congregants. Beth El has continuously altered both its physical plant and programming over the years to nurture a suburban way of life that is decidedly Jewish, appeals to the whole family, and in which religion and service continue to play a strong role.

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[97] Ibid, 232.
[98] *Beth El Congregation's 50th Anniversary Book* (Baltimore, Md: 1999), n.p.
[99] Orthodox Judaism prescribes that congregants may only use a Mikvah at a non-Orthodox synagogue if it has its own exterior entrance, with no interior connection to other portions of the synagogue.
[100] *Beth El Congregation's 50th Anniversary Book*, n.p.

The auditorium is in the northernmost portion of the complex and was part of Braverman's original concept. Although the space was renovated in the early 1990s, the auditorium remains in use for its original purpose of celebrations, receptions, and additional service space during the High Holidays. The administrative wing, also part of Braverman's design, was damaged by a severe fire in 1990. This space was subsequently renovated in 1997.[101]

The original Bluefield Chapel was used from 1960 to 1998 for daily minyan services and life cycle events including weddings, baby namings and special aliyot.[102] In 1997 groundbreaking took place for the new Sarah Gorn Chapel, located to the south of the formal entrance, facing Park Heights Avenue. The chapel was designed by Diane Torn and Associates and is used for small services, talks, weddings, and extra service space during the High Holidays. It has a traditional seating plan with the Bema in the center. The chapel includes its own Ark and a Ner Tamid of sculptured stained glass. In addition, there are twenty-two Jewish value concepts rendered in engraved metal in the lighting coves around the perimeter of the room.[103]

Rabbi Agus (1911-1986)

Rabbi Jacob B. Agus was the first rabbi of Beth El; he oversaw the construction of the new suburban synagogue complex, and was highly involved in the design and development process. Agus was a charismatic rabbi with an international reputation as a religious leader. Within the United States, Agus was one of the most prominent, national figures among Jewish scholars and rabbis.

Rabbi Agus was born in Poland in 1911, where he attended Jewish school. He was raised in a strict Orthodox Jewish family, with a rabbi for a father, and was fully immersed in Jewish life. Due to the economic and political conditions in his home country, the Agus family emigrated to Palestine in 1925. Political and social conditions in Palestine were also worsening, so the family relocated to the United States two years later. Agus's father took a position as a rabbi in an East Side New York Synagogue and the family settled in Brooklyn.[104]

While in New York, Agus attended the newly formed Yeshiva University and obtained his rabbinical ordination in 1933. In 1935, after two additional years of education, he received the traditional "Yadin Yadin" smicha – ordination that placed him on an equivalent level as rabbinical students who graduated from European yeshivas. This higher level of ordination allowed him to function as a legal decision maker within the Jewish community.[105]

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[101] Ibid.
[102] Aliyot literally refers to the immigration of Jews into Israel, but is commonly used to refer to the first time a congregant reads from the Torah.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Steven T. Katz, *American Rabbi* (New York: 1997), 1-2.
[105] Ibid, 2.

Agus's first full-time position as a rabbi was at an Orthodox congregation in Norfolk, Virginia. He left Norfolk in 1936 and moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts to attend Harvard University's graduate program in philosophy. While in graduate school, Agus continued to work as a rabbi at a synagogue in Cambridge. In Boston, he confronted for the first time a serious criticism of traditional Judaism. Agus was dedicated to his Orthodox beliefs and the alternative views he encountered only fueled his desire to defend the Jewish tradition.[106] Agus received his doctorate degree from Harvard and accepted a position as the rabbi at the Orthodox Agudas Achim Congregation in Chicago, Illinois. While in Chicago, Agus began to rethink his strict views on Jewish Orthodoxy and slowly started to take a more liberal stance towards Judaism.

In 1943, Agus moved to Dayton, Ohio where he accepted the rabbinical position at a new liberal Orthodox congregation. The synagogue had been formed by the merging of three small synagogues and would eventually become a Conservative congregation during Agus's tenure. Due to the proximity of Dayton to Cincinnati, Agus became involved with activities at the Hebrew Union College, the center of the Reform movement. He became officially aligned with Conservatism in 1946 after his attempts at religious and structural change within the Orthodox community failed. Agus subsequently joined the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly.

In 1950, Agus accepted the position at Beth El in Baltimore. Although the congregation was a small synagogue of about fifty families when he arrived, "it grew over his three decades as its rabbi into a major congregation – so popular, in fact, that it had to restrict new memberships – and one of the premier Conservative synagogues in the United States."[107] Agus served as Beth El's rabbi until 1980. When he took the position, Agus was already a noted scholar with an international reputation and he held bi-monthly seminars for rabbis of all denominations in the Baltimore-Washington region. During the construction of the suburban synagogue complex, he "worked closely with the architects and designers to ensure that it would be both aesthetic and Jewishly pleasing."[108]

Agus was committed to fostering a knowledge and understanding of the Jewish faith. During the 1950s, he taught at Johns Hopkins University as an adjunct professor of philosophy. Also during this period, he lectured at the B'nai B'rith institutes, and spoke at various colleges and seminaries around the country. Agus also served, in 1966, as a visiting professor at the Rabbinical Seminary in Buenos Aires, a school affiliated with the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. In 1968, during his tenure as rabbi at Beth El, he also accepted a joint appointment as a professor of Rabbinic Civilization at the new Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) in Philadelphia and Temple University. He taught in this capacity until the end of the academic year of 1970, although he retained his professorship at Temple until 1980. That same year he accepted an adjunct professor appointment at Dropsie College in Philadelphia, where he taught until 1985.

Over the course of his career as a rabbi, Agus published a total of eleven books: *Modern Philosophies of Judaism* (1941), *Message of Judaism* (1945), *Banner of Jerusalem* (1946), *Guideposts in Modern Judaism*

[106] Ibid, 3.
[107] Ibid, 8.
[108] Ibid, 9.

(1954), *The Goldenson Lecture: The Prophet in Modern Hebrew Literature* (1957), *The Evolution of Jewish Thought* (1959), *The Meaning of Jewish History* (1963), *The Vision and the Way; An Interpretation of Jewish Ethics* (1966), *Dialogue and Tradition: The Challenges of Contemporary Judeo-Christian Thought* (1971), *Jewish Identity in an Age of Ideologies* (1978), and *The Jewish Quest: Essays on Basic Concepts of Jewish Theology* (1983). In addition, he was a regular contributor to Jewish periodicals such as *Menorah Journal*, *Judaism*, *Midstream*, and *The Reconstructionist*.[109]

Sigmund Braverman (1894-1960)

Sigmund Braverman was a prominent Jewish architect who worked out of Cleveland, Ohio. He was born in Caepe, Austria-Hungary and moved to the United States in 1904, where his family settled in Pittsburgh. He graduated from the Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1917 with a Bachelor of Science degree in architecture and then served in World War I. After serving, he moved to Cleveland where he would eventually start his own architectural practice. From 1932-1935 he served as the assistant, and then acting, City Architect for Cleveland. Braverman formed a partnership with Moses P. Halperin in 1948, and subsequently formed the company of Braverman & Halperin Architects, with a single office in Cleveland.[110] Today, Braverman's papers are archived at the Western Reserve Historical Library in Cleveland.

Throughout his career, Braverman designed a number of synagogues, mainly in Cleveland, but also in other parts of both the United States and Canada. In addition to his religious architecture, he also designed other Jewish-oriented buildings, apartment buildings, theaters, shopping centers, schools, and restaurants. Braverman's primary synagogue work is located in Cleveland and includes the Young Israel Synagogue, Warrensville Center Synagogue, Temple Emanu El (c.1954), Temple on the Heights, and the Fairmount Temple. Braverman also designed the Beth El Synagogue in Akron, Ohio (c.1952), Temple Israel in Canton, Ohio (c.1954), and Temple Israel in Omaha, Nebraska (c.1954).[111] Braverman also designed the Orthodox Home for the Aged, Cleveland Hebrew Schools, and the Bureau of Jewish education in Cleveland.

In an effort to further his profession in the realm of Jewish architecture, Braverman published a number of articles on the subject of synagogue architecture. In addition, he was an active member of a number of professional and cultural organizations including the Bureau of Jewish Education, Jewish Welfare Foundation, Jewish Community Center, and the Zionist Movement.[112]

Sigmund Braverman was hired by the board of Beth El in 1959 to design the new suburban synagogue complex. The congregation had to negotiate with the local financing bank to secure the construction mortgage, as Braverman was a resident of Ohio. He worked closely with members of the congregation, including Rabbi Agus, on the design, making a variety of trips to Baltimore to meet with these parties. Braverman completed

[109] Ibid, 237.
[110] "Sigmund Braverman Papers: Bio/History," located at the Western Reserve Historical Society Library, Cleveland Ohio.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

the initial design for the project, and construction began in 1959. Throughout the construction process, the architect of a project such as this was required to make alterations and minor changes to the design. Braverman suffered an untimely death in early spring of 1960, though, and was thus unable to see the project to fruition. In order to continue with construction, the financing bank provided Beth El with a list of pre-approved local architects to continue with the supervision and certifications throughout the construction process. From this list, Beth El chose the firm of Tyler, Ketcham, & Myers to see the project through to completion.[113]

Tyler, Ketcham, & Myers

After Braverman's unexpected passing, Beth El retained the firm of Tyler, Ketcham, & Myers to complete the suburban synagogue complex. Their primary role was to oversee the construction process, complete any necessary certifications, and deal with any minor alterations to the design that arose during construction. This was a local architectural firm, based in Baltimore, with an office at 513 Park Avenue. The firm was established in 1946 and included three principals: John Poe Tyler (1907-), Jackson P. Ketcham (1905-), and Robert E. Myers (1900-). Tyler was born in Baltimore and received his Bachelor of Science in Architecture degree from Princeton University in 1929. From 1929 to 1936, he worked for the firm of Joseph, Evans, Sperry (later Crisp & Edmunds) and ran his own firm from 1936 to 1942. Ketcham was born in Poughkeepsie, New York and received a Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1928 from the University of Pennsylvania. His first job was as a designer and draftsman for John T. Windrim (1929-1930). Ketcham also ran his own firm from 1932 to 1934. After this he worked as a designer and supervisor for Lucius R. White, Jr. (1935-1937) and as a drafting, specifications writer, and supervisor for Buckler & Fenhagen (1937-1944). Robert Myers was also born in Baltimore and received his training at night school at the Maryland Institute (1916-1920) and Johns Hopkins University where he studied engineering from 1935 to 1938. He worked as a junior draftsman for Otto G. Simpson (1916-1920), and as a senior draftsman for Lucius R. White, Jr. (1922-1942) and Palmer & Lamdin (1942-1945).[114]

The firm principally worked in Baltimore and their work includes the Hub Appliance Store (c.1946), a Hess Shoe Store (c.1948), Booker T. Washington School (c.1951), Cherry Hill Housing (c.1952, with Hilyard Robinson), Westowne Elementary School (c.1953), Union Federal Savings & Loan Association (c.1954), Gunther Brewing Company (c.1955), and a Hamburger's Clothiers building (c.1965). Beginning in 1952, the firm also served as an architectural consultant to the State of Maryland Roads Commission.[115]

The firm received two first prize awards from the Baltimore Association of Commerce. The first was in 1947 for the Hub Appliance Store and the second in 1949 for their Hess Shoe Store. The principals of the firm were all members of the Building Congress & Exchange of Baltimore and the Baltimore Association of Commerce.

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[113] Letter from Marcy M. Ehudin (Beth El congregant) to Mrs. Sigmund Braverman, April 20, 1960. Courtesy of the Western Reserve Historical Society Library, 10825 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio, 44106.
[114] AIA Directory: 1956, 297, 399, 569.
[115] Ibid.

Jackson Ketcham also served on the Architectural Review Boards for Baltimore County and the State of Maryland. In addition, all three principals were active members in the Baltimore Chapter of the AIA and Ketcham served as the organization's treasurer from 1950 to 1953.[116]

Artwork at Beth El

The Beth El complex features a number of significant works of art, although we could find little documentation on the artwork or the artists. The artwork at the complex is one of the elements that truly distinguishes the building as a significant structure. The combination of contemporary art with a Modernist building created a truly unique and wholly designed complex. One of the most striking features of all the suburban synagogues in Baltimore is the skillful coalescence of art and architecture and the careful attention to the interior finish work, including art. During this period of Modern synagogue construction, many religious facilities were continuing to rely on traditional art for decoration. Given this context, the use of Modern art by Beth El is exceptional. To complete some of the artwork, Beth El hired one of the best Jewish artists of the time, Raymond Katz.

The most striking art at Beth El is focused in and at the entrance to the prayer hall. Flanking the formal entrance there are two large granite pylons topped with abstract sculptured menorahs. The pylons have a Hebrew monogram and two inscriptions that read: "*To the martyrs of the past*" and "*To the builders of the future*." On the exterior of the building, above the formal entrance, are three brass and ceramic plaques depicting Hebrew letters that represent the concepts of Creation, Revelation, and Redemption.[117]

In the main foyer on the interior there are two handcrafted tapestries on the north and south walls, just inside the doors, entitled "*Women of the Bible*" and "*Visions of the Prophets*." Also within the sanctuary lobby, on the west side, there is a set of glass panels above a second entryway. Etched into the glass panels are three sets of representations of the ideals of study, worship, and the deeds of loving-kindness. Also visible in the foyer, above the entrance doors to the sanctuary is a metal sculpture of Hebrew letters that reads: "Open for me the gates of eternal justice that I may enter and praise GOD", from Psalm 118:19.[118]

Within the sanctuary, the Eternal Light hangs above the Ark. The sculptured piece appears as clasped hands enclosing the light. In addition, the sanctuary menorah, with its imagery of branches of a tree, represents the seven pillars of wisdom. Executed in bronze, it declares, "A tree of life it is to those who hold onto it."[119]

The contemporary Sarah Gorn Chapel contains twenty-two Jewish value concepts rendered in engraved metal in the lighting coves around the perimeter of the chapel. In addition, there are two large stained-glass sculptures

[116] Ibid.
[117] *Beth El Congregation's 50th Anniversary Book*, Baltimore (Md: 1999).
[118] Ibid.
[119] *Beth El Congregation's 50th Anniversary Book* (Baltimore, Md: 1999), 12.

that represent both the fire that guided the Jewish people through the desert at night and the clouds that guided them during the day. These are installed diagonally in the corners, backlit by the chapel's dramatic vertical corner fenestration.

Raymond A. Katz (1895-1974)

Raymond A. Katz, an artist from New York City, designed the stained glass windows in both the sanctuary and the Bluefield chapel. He was a prominent Jewish artist in the mid-twentieth century and possibly "the most genuinely Jewish of all contemporary American artists…he recreates the intuitions and conceptions and insights and moral convictions of the Jewish heritage into symbols that transcend time and place yet are meaningful to all people everywhere."[120] He primarily worked with Jewish and religious subjects. The windows at Beth El were completed and installed in 1960, with the exception of the window, *Passover*, which was dedicated in 1965. The twenty-four, narrow and vertical, stained glass windows along the west wall of the sanctuary represent the twenty-four books of the Bible. The larger stained glass windows along the side walls in the sanctuary represent the holidays, the Shabbat,and the daily mitzvot of Jewish life.

Katz was born in Kassa, Hungary in 1895 and moved to the United States in 1909. Upon arrival, he changed his birth name, Sandor, to the anglicized Alexander. He was trained at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. He worked in the 1920s as a director of the Poster Department at Paramount Studios. Katz was urged by Frank Lloyd Wright to enter the field of mural painting and in 1933 he was commissioned to complete a mural for the Century of Progress exposition in Chicago. This piece, the "Ten Commandments," was based on the Hebrew alphabet. Katz was interested in the possibilities of using the Hebrew alphabet in a symbolic manner. During his career he "developed aesthetic and philosophical interpretations of each letter and became the leading innovator and pioneer in the field of Hebraic art."[121] His work is included in the permanent collections of several prominent art museums including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and the Jewish Museum in New York City. Over the course of his career Katz completed murals, bas-relief sculptures, and stained glass designs in over 200 Jewish synagogues throughout the United States.[122]

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[120] Excepted from the Commentary by Charles Angoff, November 1964, available on-line at: www.rafa.com/a0bzpix.htm.
[121] Available on-line at: www.oakton.edu/news/events/gallery/Katz.html.
[122] Ibid.

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 14.775

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1				3			
2				4			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Stephanie R. Ryberg, Dr. Mary Corbin Sies, Dr. Isabelle Gournay, and Jen Feldman

Organization University of Maryland, School of Architecture, Planning & Preservation date 1-31-05

street & number School of Architecture telephone 301-405-6284

city or town College Park state MD zip code 20742

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO)

name Beth El Congregation of Baltimore

street & number 8101 Park Heights Avenue telephone 410-484-0411

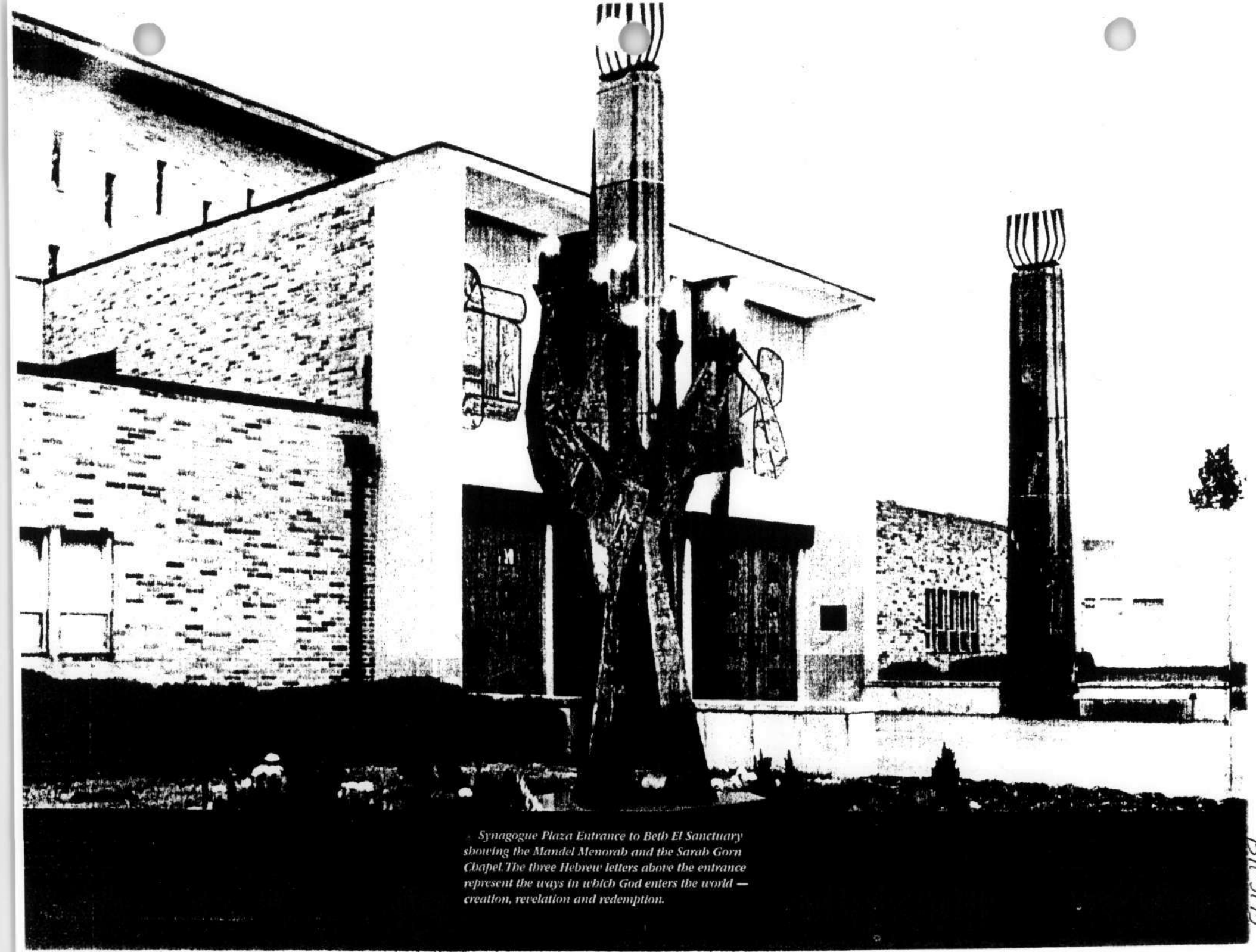
city or town Baltimore County state Maryland zip code 21208

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary for the property is the identical to that as defined on the tax map and parcel.

Boundary Justification:

This boundary defines the historical property as well as the present day site of the congregation.

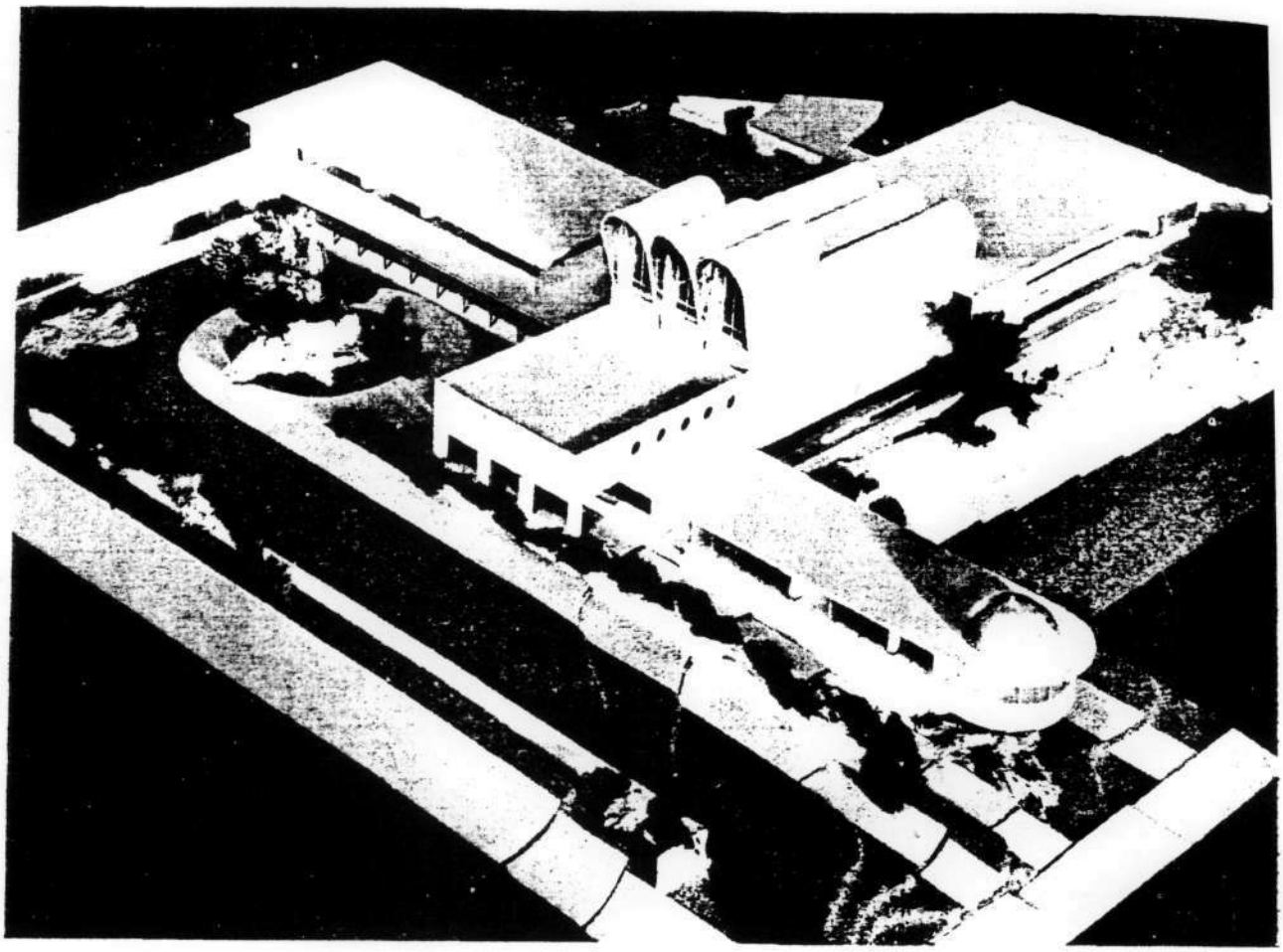


Synagogue Plaza Entrance to Beth El Sanctuary showing the Mandel Menorah and the Sarah Gorn Chapel. The three Hebrew letters above the entrance represent the ways in which God enters the world — creation, revelation and redemption.

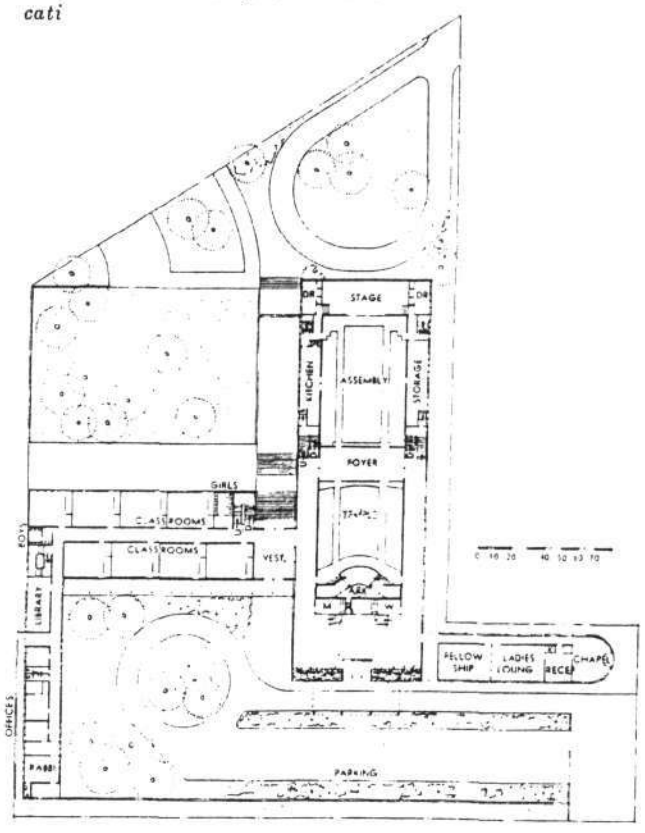
BA-3173

Plate 2
Beth El
The synagogue entrance with the Mandel Menorah in the foreground.
Source: *Beth El Congregation's 50th Anniversary Book.* Baltimor
Md: Beth El Congregation, 1999, 4.

BA-3173



80J *Model. Photo by Stone & Steccati*



81J *Plan.*

Plate 1
Beth El
Plans for the Beth El synagogue complex completed by Eric Mendelsohn (predates the current facility).
Source: Thiry, Paul, Richard M. Bennett, and Henry L. Kamphoefner. *Churches & Temples*. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1953, 46J.

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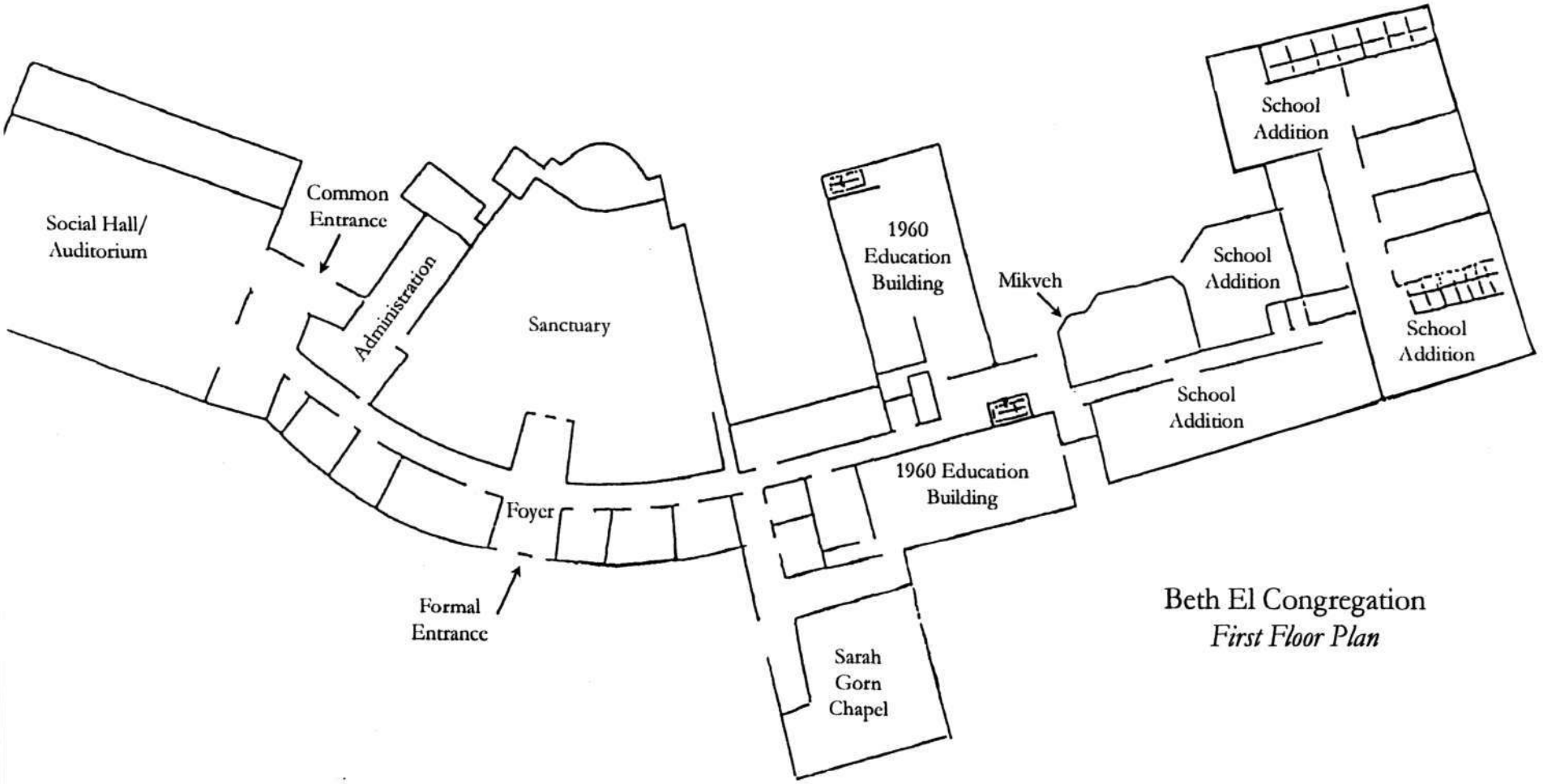
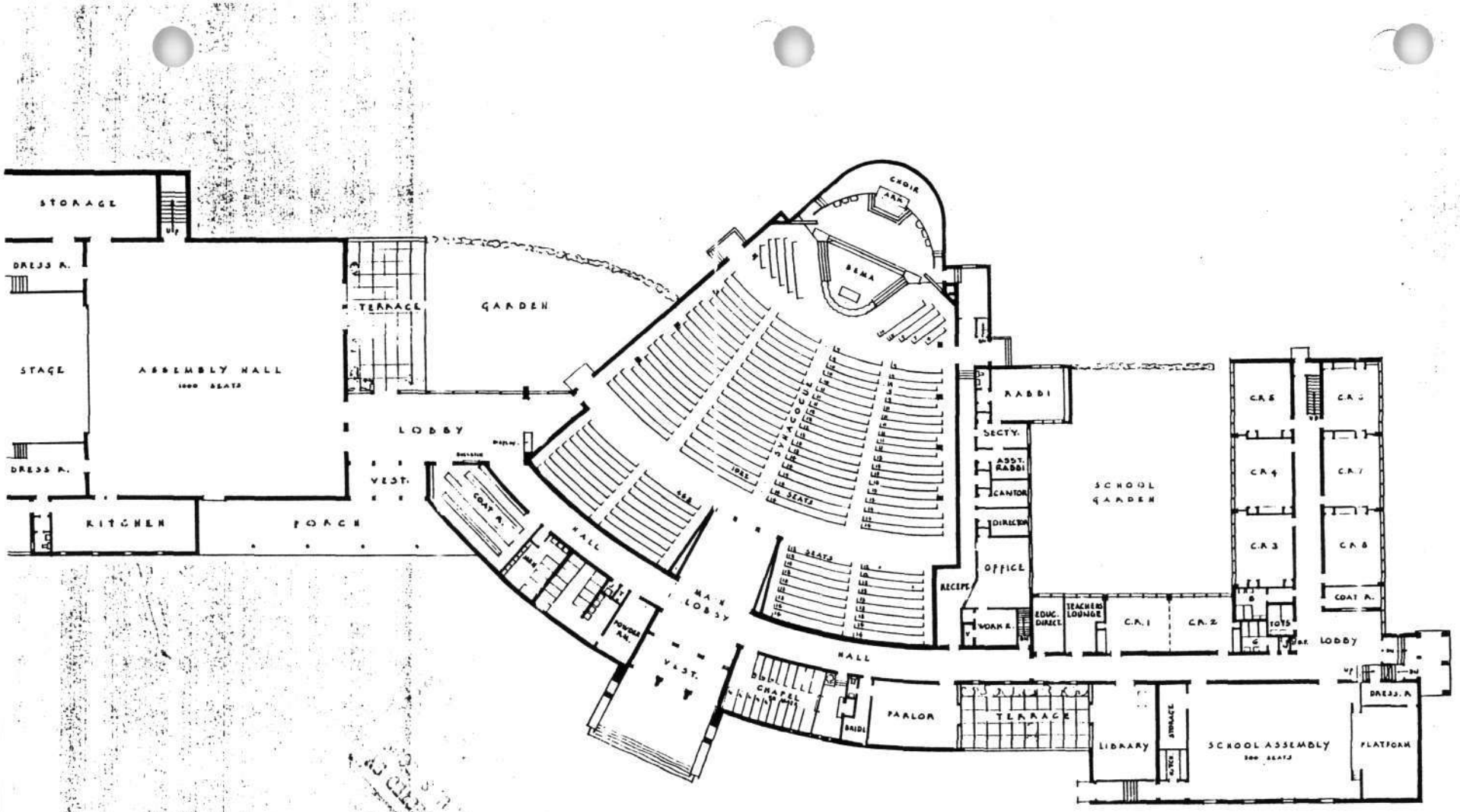


Beth El Congregation
First Floor Plan

BA-3173

Plate 3
Beth El
Floor plan of Beth El Congregation synagogue complex.
Provided by the Beth El Congregation.

BA- 3173



FLOOR PLAN

BA-3173

Plate 4
Beth El
First floor plan, completed by Sigmund Braverman.
Source: "Sigmund Braverman Papers: 1936-1965," container 1, folder 9, The Western Reserve Historical Society Library.
Reproduced from a promotional brochure for the Beth El Congregation, Baltimore, MD.

BA-3173

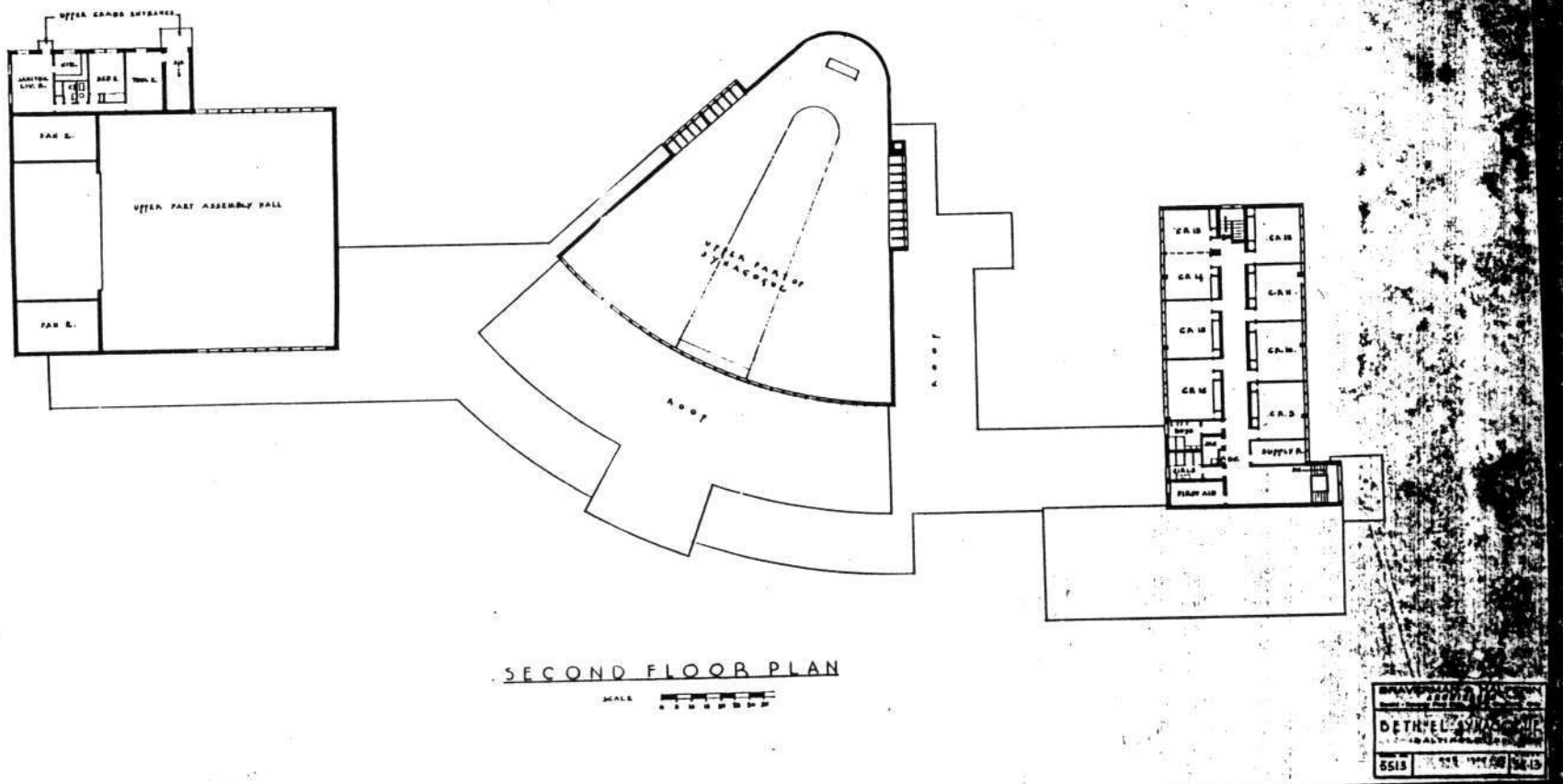
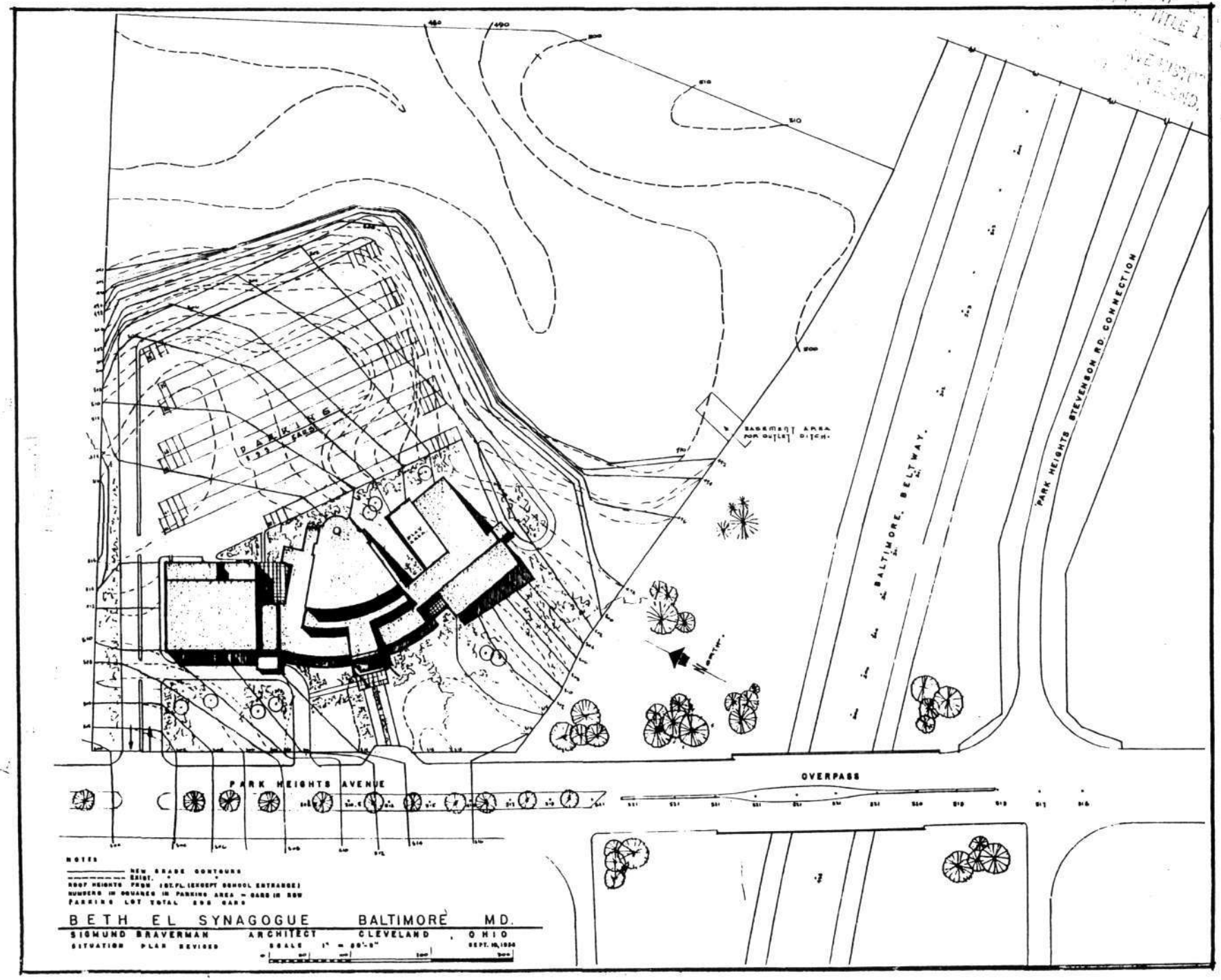

UPPER GRADE ENTRANCE
UPPER PART ASSEMBLY HALL
ROOF
ROOF
SECOND FLOOR PLAN
SCALE

Plate 5
Beth El
Second floor plan, completed by Sigmund Braverman.
Source: "Sigmund Braverman Papers: 1936-1965," container 2,
folder 4, The Western Reserve Historical Society Library.

BA-3173

23 Maryland, Baltimore -- Beth El Synagogue

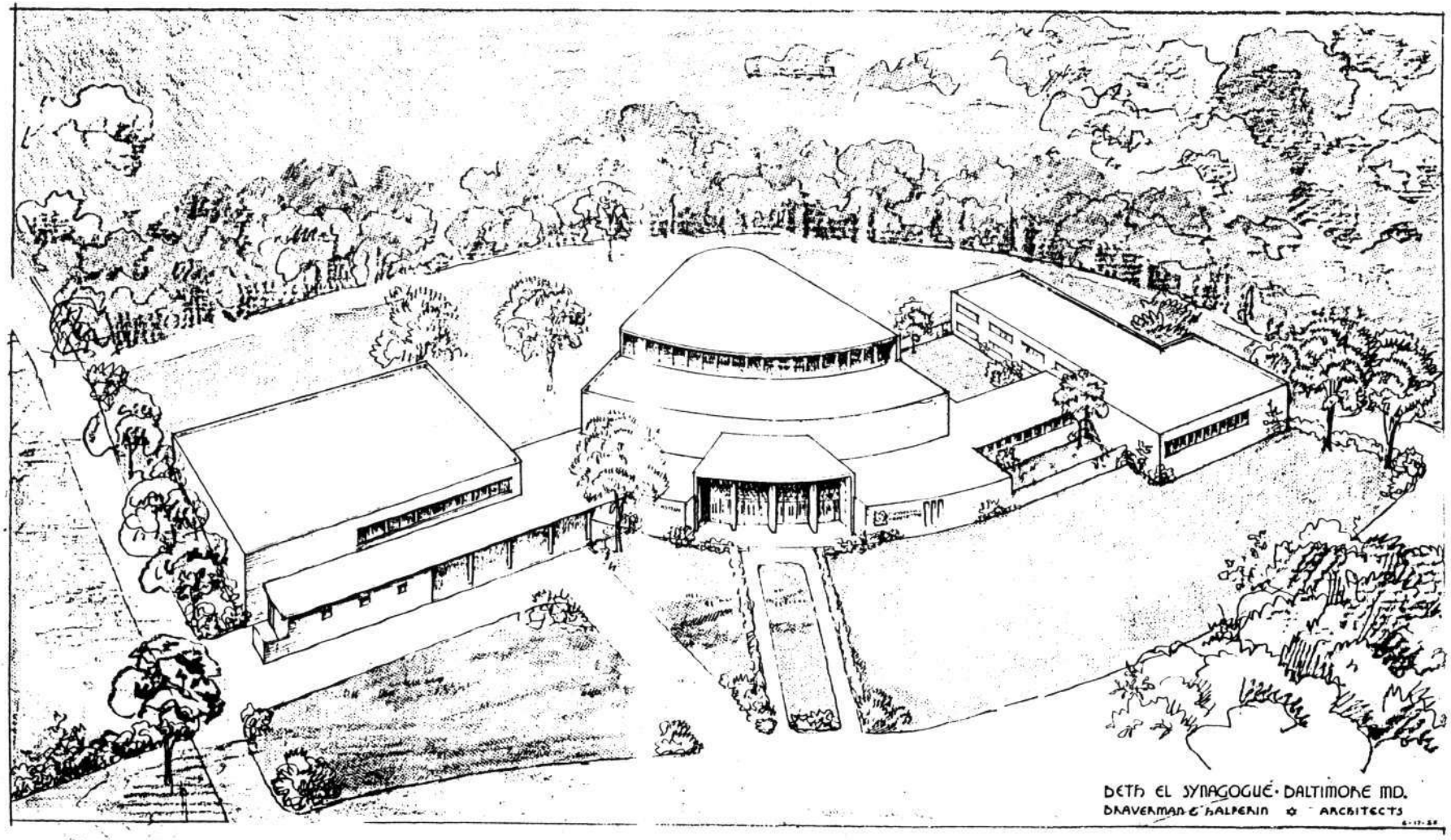


BA-3173

Plate 6
Beth El
Site plan, completed by Sigmund Braverman.
Source: "Sigmund Braverman Photographs, P.G. 210," container 1
folder 23, The Western Reserve Historical Society Library.

BA-3173

Baltimore - Beth El Synagogue

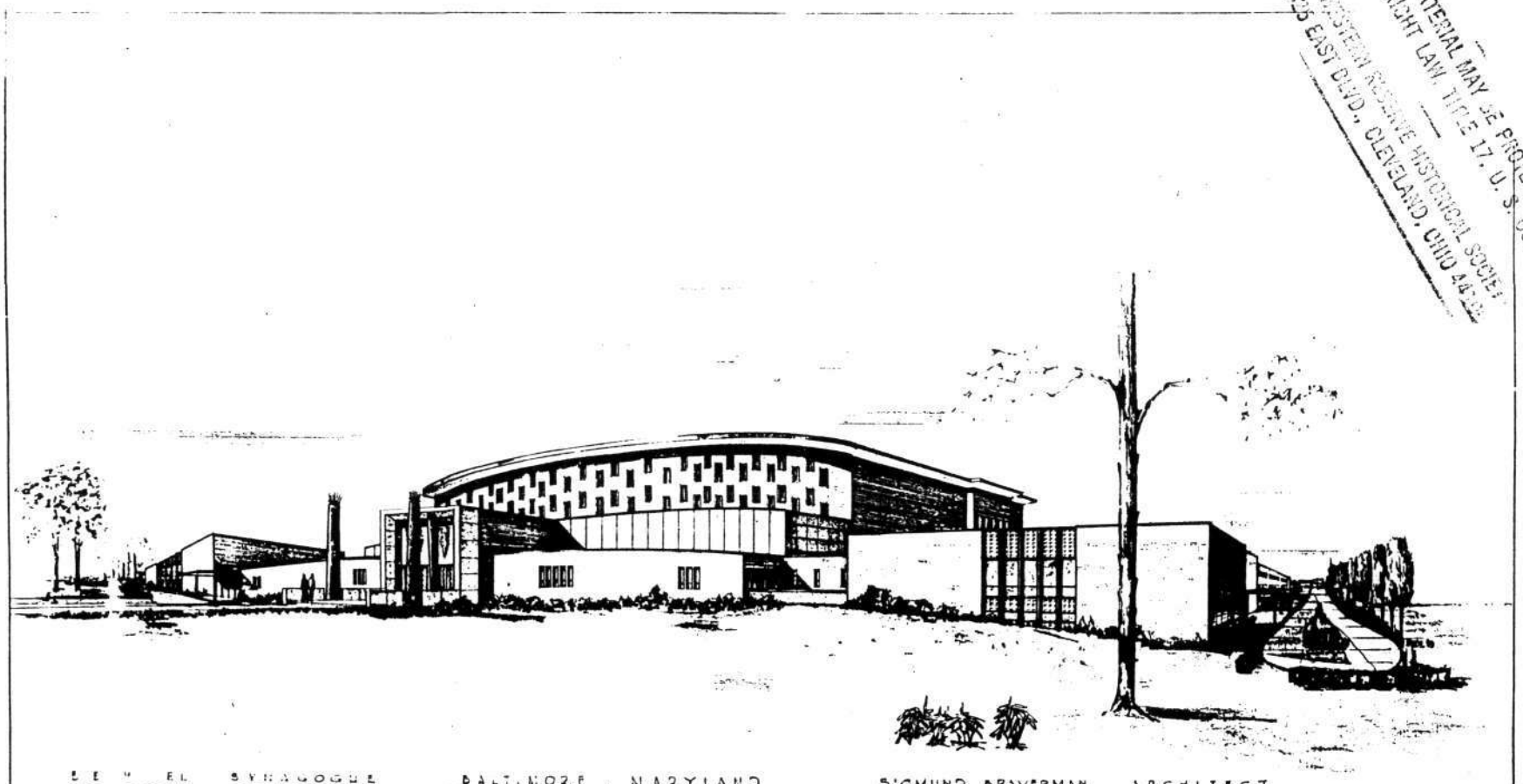


BA-3173

Plate 7
Beth El
Sketch of the proposed Beth El Synagogue, completed by Sigmund Braverman.
Source: "Sigmund Braverman Photographs, P.G. 210," container 2, folder 23, The Western Reserve Historical Society Library.

BA-3173

Maryland, Baltimore - Beth El



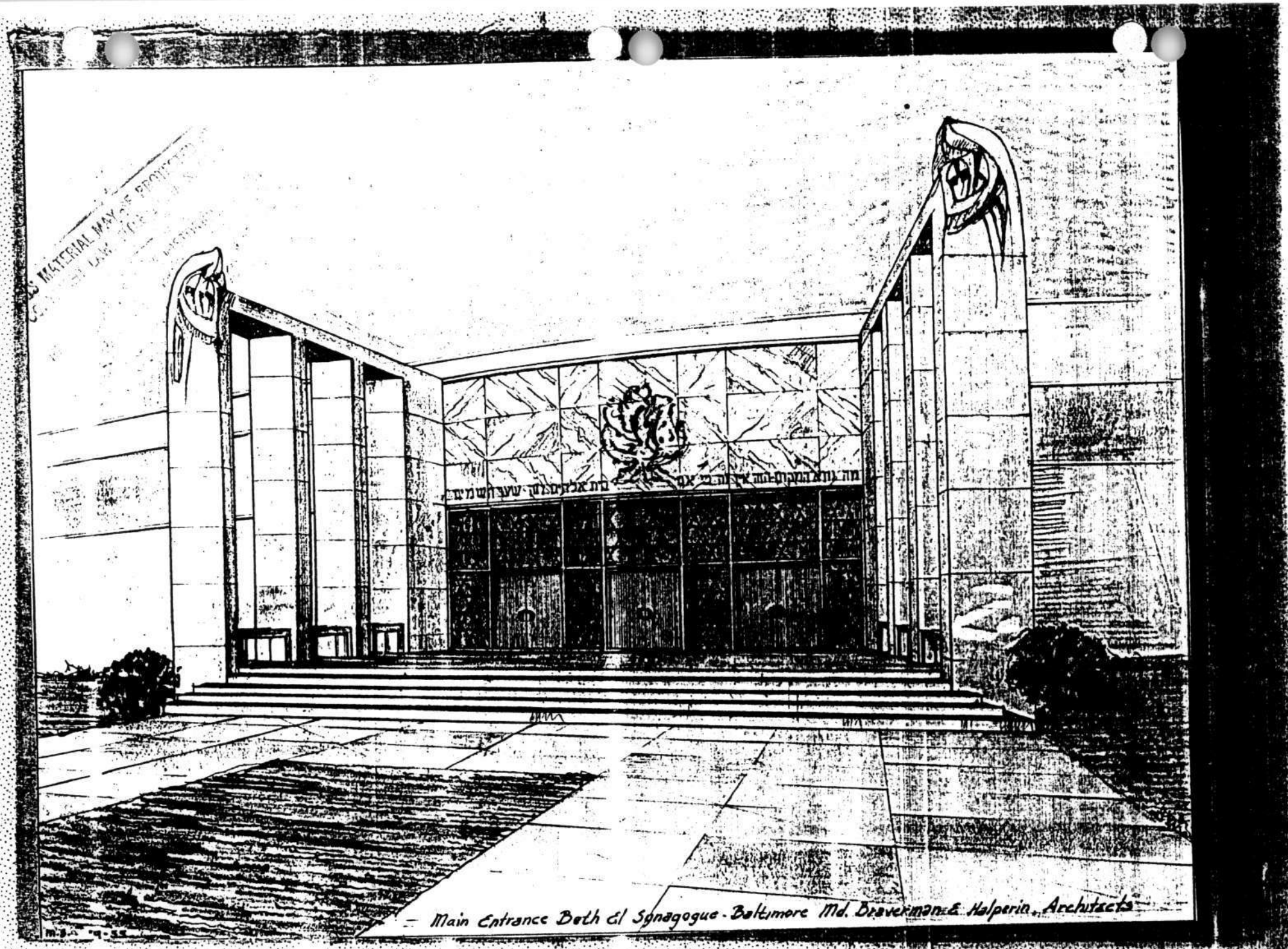
BETH EL SYNAGOGUE BALTIMORE, MARYLAND SIGMUND BRAVERMAN ARCHITECT

JANUARY 1, 1959

BA-3173

Plate 8
Beth El
Sketch of the main façade (facing Park Heights Avenue),
completed by Sigmund Braverman.
Source: "Sigmund Braverman Photographs, P.G. 210," container 2
folder 23, The Western Reserve Historical Society Library.

BA-3173

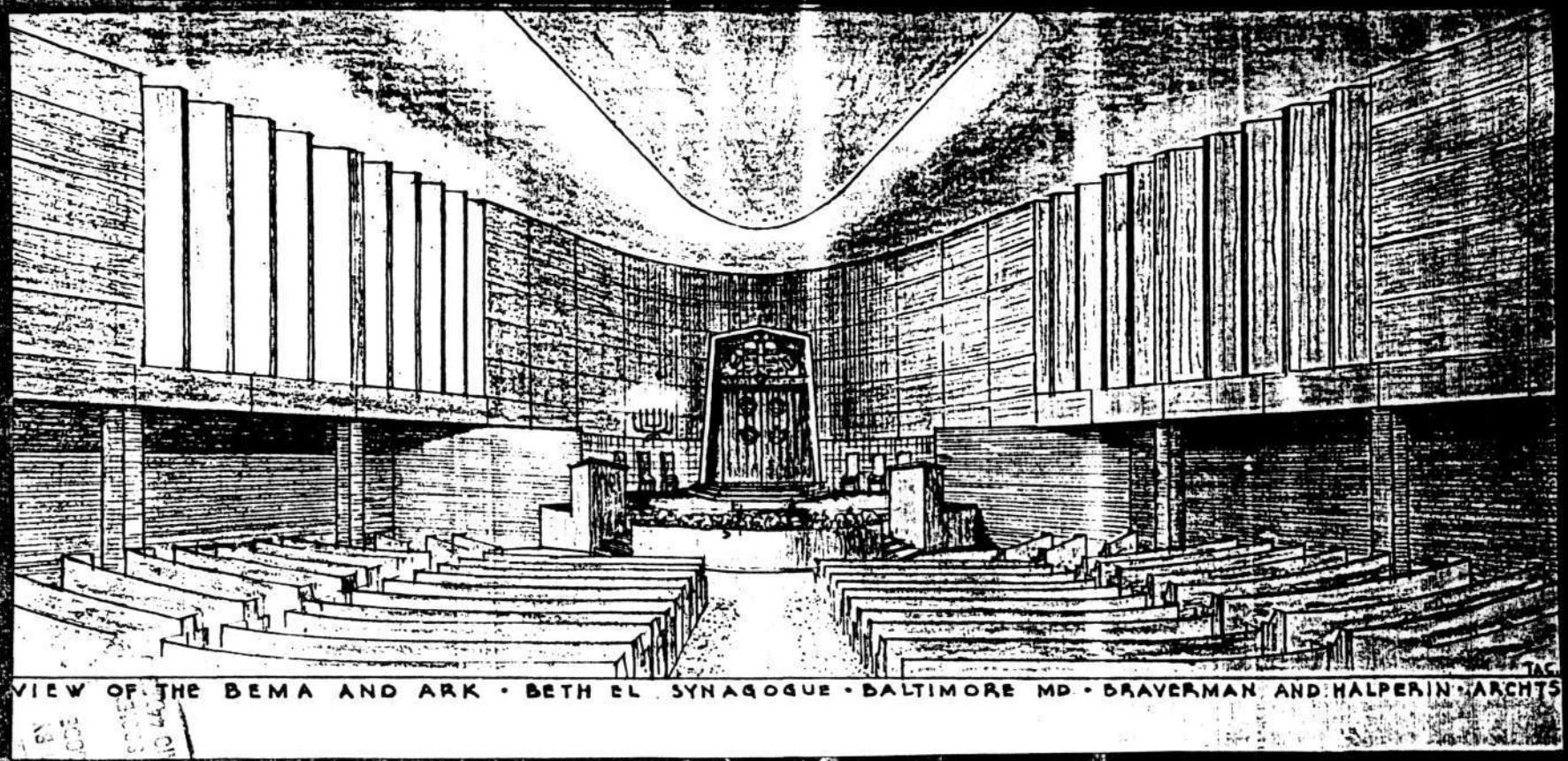


Main Entrance Beth El Synagogue - Baltimore Md. Braverman & Halperin, Architects

BA-3173

Plate 9
Beth El
Sketch of the main entrance to the Beth El Synagogue, completed by Sigmund Braverman.
Source: "Sigmund Braverman Papers: 1936-1965," container 2, folder 4, The Western Reserve Historical Society Library.

BA-3173



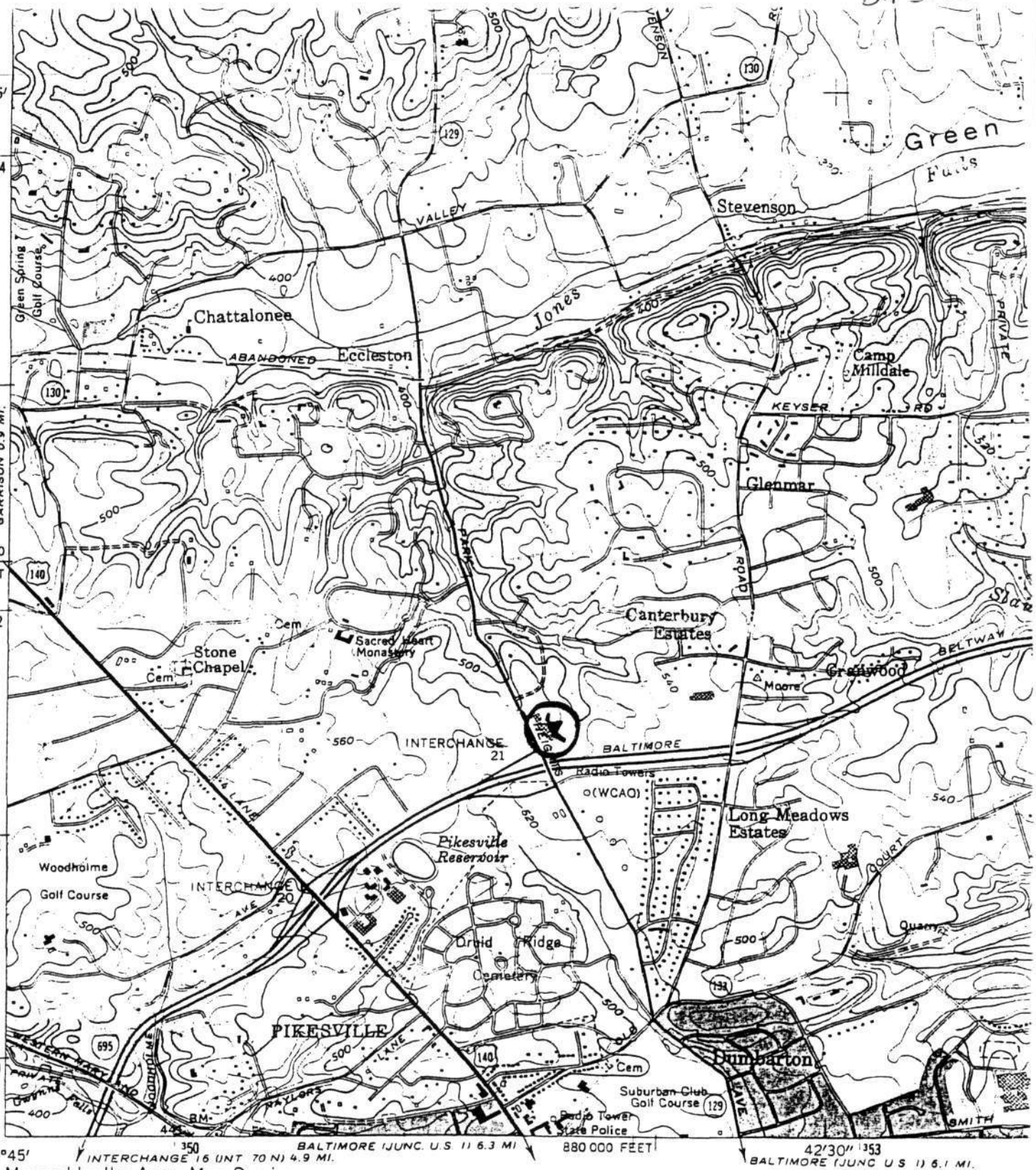
VIEW OF THE BEMA AND ARK · BETH EL SYNAGOGUE · BALTIMORE MD · BRAVERMAN AND HALPERIN · ARCHTS

BA-3173.

Plate 10
Beth El
Sketch of the sanctuary, looking towards the Ark and Bema,
completed by Sigmund Braverman.
Source: "Sigmund Braverman Papers: 1936-1965," container 2,
folder 4, The Western Reserve Historical Society Library.

BA-3173

BA-3173



Mapped by the Army Map Service
Edited and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS and USC&GS

Topography from aerial photographs by photogrammetric methods. Aerial photographs taken 1943. Field check 1944
Culture revised by the Geological Survey 1957

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on Maryland coordinate system
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 18, shown in blue

Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown

Revisions shown in purple compiled by the Geological Survey from aerial photographs taken 1966. This information not field checked

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8° 142 MILS 1°04' 19 MILS

1 1000

BETH EL SYNAGOGUE
USGS COCKEYSVILLE, MD
NW 4 BALTIMORE 15' QUADRANGLE
N 3922.5 - W 7637.5 / 7.5 1957
PHOTOREVISED 1966 SCALE 1:24000

BA-3173

THIS FOR SAL


'94 1 1

BA-3173

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

Mary Corbin Sies
April 2003
Maryland Historic Trust

#1 The formal entrance to the Beth El complex
note the original granite pillars flanking the
doorway and the tiled mosaics above the doors.


THE STOLE
WING
'94 1 1

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD

Baltimore County, MD

BA-3173

Mary Corbin Sies
April 2003
Maryland Historic Trust

The primary entrance to the complex
#2 from the parking lot.


'94

Beth El Congregation
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Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

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Mary Corbin Sies

April 2003
Maryland Historic Trust

The rear facade of the sanctuary.

#3


'94 1 1

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

BA-3173

Mary Corbin Sies

April 2003

Maryland Historic Trust

The rear facade of the synagogue complex, from the primary parking lot.

#4


'94 1 1

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

BA-3173

Mary Corbin Sies
April 2003
Maryland Historic Trust

The north facade of the Sarah Gomchapel

#5


'94 1 1

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

BA-3173

Mary Corbin Sies
April 2003
Maryland Historic Trust

The rear facade of the social hall.

#6


'94 1 1

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

BA-3173

Mary Corbin Sies,
April 2003
Maryland Historic Trust

South façade of the education building

#7


'94 1 1

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

BA-3173

Mary Corbin Sies
April 2003
Maryland Historic Trust

The education building, facing Park Heights Avenue

#8

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

BA-3173

Mary Corbin Sies
April 2003
Maryland Historic Trust

Decorative Sculpture in the front lawn of the Beth El Complex.

#9


'94 1 1

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

BA-3173

Mary Corbin Sies
April 2003
Maryland Historic Trust

The rear wall of the sanctuary showing the Staggard stained glass windows, designed by Raymond A. Katz, that line the backwall.

#10


זכר צדיק לברכה
'94 1 1

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

BA-3173

Mary Corbin Sies

April 2003
Maryland Historic Trust

Entrance doors to the sanctuary, from the foyer.

#11


'94 1 1

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

BA-3173

Mary Corbin Sies
April 2003
Maryland Historic Trust

Set of stained glass windows on the side wall of the sanctuary.

#12

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

BA 3173

Mary Corbin Sies

April 2003

Maryland Historic Trust

Ark at the front of the sanctuary.

#13


THE
BLUEFELD CHAPEL
'94 1 1

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

BA-3173

Mary Corbin Sies
April 2003
Maryland Historic Trust

Original Chapel of Beth El, now the meditation room

#14


'94 1 1

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

BA-3173

Mary Corbin Sies

April 2003

Maryland Historic Trust

Sarah Gorn chapel, constructed in 1999.

#15


'94 1 1

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD

BA-3173

Baltimore County, MD

Mary Corbin Sies

April 2003

Maryland Historic Trust

Social Hall looking from the entrance doors to the elevated stage on the north end.

#16

Beth El Congregation
8101 Park Heights Avenue
Baltimore, MD
Baltimore County, MD

BA-3773

Mary Corbin Sies
April 2003
Maryland Historic Trust

One of the original classrooms at Beth El.
Note the built in wooden cabinets and shelving.
#17